Feminist Action, Institutional Reaction:

Responses to Wife Assault

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Women's Research Centre

Feminist Action, Institutional Reaction:

Responses to Wife Assault

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Preamble:

This discussion paper examines how institutions respond to women's issues.

We undertook this project out of a recognition that the Women's Movement in Canada has focussed much of its effort to improve women's situations on pressuring the state and its institutions to respond more positively to women's needs and issues and out of an attendant concern that feminist analysis of institutions and the state has not kept pace with the Movement's organizing, lobbying, and advocacy efforts.

We worked from the premise that in analysing women's experience with one particular institution's response to an issue we would uncover some key features of how institutions generally respond and, thereby, obtain useful information for future strategy development.

The focus of this paper is the Vancouver United Way's 1977 Symposium and subsequent Task Force on Family Violence, which operated from 1977 to 1979. Although the Symposium and Task Force were of most significance to women's groups working on wife battering in the lower mainland of B.C., we found that this specific case illustrated many characteristics of institutional response that are relevant beyond the local level and beyond the issue of wife battering.

The first section of the paper outlines the work and discussions which led us to undertake an examination of institutional response and explains why we chose the United Way example. In addition, we describe briefly how we conducted the background research on which the paper is based. Next we define the terms and declare the assumptions that are central to our discussions of the state and institutional practice. In section three, as background to the United Way case, we review feminist work in identifying and defining the issue of wife battering. Sections four and five consist of a description and analysis of the United Way Symposium and Task Force, respectively, and are followed by a review of the Task Force report. Section seven is a postscript to the Task Force and focusses on events subsequent to the publication of the report. The final sections of the paper discuss the nature and implications of institutional response and outline considerations for resisting the institutionalization of women's issues.

1. Introduction

A. Rationale:

Like most women's groups, the Women's Research Centre has been involved in many different issues including sexual harassment, wife assault, rape, pornography, child sexual abuse, the social service needs of immigrant women, and the impact of economic "mega projects" on women in northern communities. This work has regularly brought us into contact with a multiplicity of institutions. Usually the process has been one of working with women at the community level to define and analyse a particular issue and to design and carry out strategies aimed at improving women's situation. Sooner or later, no matter what the issue or strategy, we've been faced with trying to influence and change the rules, practices, or policies of one or more institutions. If the issue or strategy calls for legislative change, government becomes a focus. If education or consciousness-raising is required, the media and/or education systems must be dealt with. Work on employment related issues requires at least some understanding of unions, the corporate sector, and government. If the problem lies in how individual professionals or agencies treat women and women's concerns, attention must be paid to the policies and practices of the social welfare system or health care or police and legal systems which govern the individual professionals or agencies. And, of course, a ubiquitous problem for women's groups is funding - which usually requires negotiating with foundations, corporations, or, most often, with governments. In addition, feminists' attempts to understand specific problems of wife battering, women's economic dependence, and so on, have called into question the function of such basic institutions as marriage and the family.

In the course of our work members of the Women's Research Centre have frequently collaborated with feminists from other women's groups to analyse our "successes and failures" in influencing institutions. We've become increasingly aware of both the process and the effects of institutional response to women's issues and we've tried to unearth lessons that would make our work more effective. Too often our analysis and learning has been short-circuited by the demands on our time and energy to press on to the next battle before we've reflected sufficiently on past battles. In fact, the idea of a study to document and analyse feminists' experience with the United Way first emerged in discussions in 1979 when women from the Research Centre and from other women's groups were assessing the work they'd done with the United Way's

Symposium and Task Force on Family Violence.

The Symposium and Task Force were among the first institutional responses to the issue of wife battering (though wife battering was subsumed under the heading of "family violence"). They were also the first experiences many feminists in Vancouver had had in working with an institution from the "inside" - that is, serving on committees, doing workshops, et cetera, rather than lobbying or pressuring for change from the "outside" or community level. The Proceedings of the Symposium and the Task Force Report, published by the United Way, clearly show that both undertakings accomplished much of what they set out to do. However, among Vancouver feminists, mention of the United Way's work was met more often with jeers than applause. As Gillian Walker, who was a feminist participant in the United Way's committees, has pointed out, although the United Way "carried its appointed work forward, it did so in the face of considerable differences of opinion as to what the focus and method of work should be." In her 1981 unpublished paper, entitled "Doing it the United Way," she described the anger and frustration experienced by those who did the work and noted that:

> Without a clear basis for understanding the conflict, it was only possible to characterize it in terms of right or wrong ideas, negative personal relations between members, lack of good will, or sometimes as radicals versus reactionaries or women versus men.
> (Walker, p.2)

Walker's description is similar to the comments made by many of the feminists who assessed their participation in the Task Force. They raised several persistent questions (and suspicions) about the United Way's work on family violence. For example: Why did the United Way decide to organize the Symposium and the Task Force in the first place? Was it being opportunistic - trying to get mileage out of one of the "hot" social issues of the day? Was the United Way trying to take control of a "radical" issue - which wife battering, particularly, was widely seen to be - and locate it in a more tolerable professional context or framework? Did the United Way exploit feminists' work by involving women activists in the Task Force to gain information and credibility from them? Or, was this a genuine attempt by a "progressive" social agency to "do good"?

Much of the discussion among feminists centred on what was labelled the "institutionalization of women's issues," which - although it is an unwieldy term - seemed to cover a number of the concerns and problems feminists had experienced in working with the United Way, as well as with government and

other institutions. Institutionalization was used as a "short-hand" term for what happens to women's issues when the Women's Movement succeeds in getting the state and its various institutions to respond - either with legislative change or special programmes or simply increased attention - and for the process by which the state takes on women's issues, redefines them and compromises them often beyond recognition. From our experience, institutional response seemed most often to result in a new set of problems for women and women's groups rather than acceptable solutions. In addition, we were concerned about possibly wasting our energies in working with institutions for ultimately inconsequential gains and about an inclination to blame ourselves or each other for unexpected reverses.

We decided we had to find ways to be clearer about how specific institutions function and, ultimately, about how the state operated in relation to women's issues. The idea of doing a detailed study of women's groups' experience with one institution - the United Way - was seen as a useful step we could take to develop an analysis to guide us in setting realistic goals, expectations and strategies and in making decisions about when and how to work with institutions in the future.

Although the Women's Research Centre did not have the resources or opportunity to begin such a study until 1983, the concerns about institutionalization were central to much of our work in the intervening years. In particular, members of the Centre have been involved in the development and ongoing efforts of two groups - Battered Women's Support Services (BWSS) and the Working Group on Sexual Violence (WGSV) - which have contributed significantly to building an analysis of the nature and process of institutional response to women's issues.

BWSS was formed in 1979 largely in reaction against the practices of the United Way's committee on support groups for battered women and batterers, which followed the United Way's Task Force on Family Violence. The women who decided to create BWSS discussed, among other issues, the function of professionalism in discrediting feminists and the consequences of language - the subtle effects of, for example, the United Way's use of "family violence" rather than the term "wife battering," which feminists had traditionally used, with the result of attention and concern about women who were beaten by their husbands being diverted to concern for children and men, at women's expense. We concluded a group like BWSS was necessary, to develop support groups for battered women and to do educational work on wife battering,

independent of the United Way structure or any other institution (though working with institutions, from this independent base, was not ruled out).

The Working Group on Sexual Violence was formed in 1982 by women from several feminist organizations in Vancouver who'd been meeting together to examine and analyse the federal government's amendments to the Criminal Code regarding rape. Originally called the C-127 working group (C-127 being the number of the Bill on rape legislation), the WGSV found the amendments to be seriously flawed and of limited benefit to women and questioned the process by which the Women's Movement had "succeeded" in influencing the government to produce them. In articles for Kinesis (the women's newspaper published by Vancouver Status of Women) the WGSV outlined problems with the amendments and with the process including the government's designation of "experts" from the Women's Movement, the use of gender-neutral language, the role of women's groups at both the community and national level, and the effects of accepting a traditional legal framework as the starting point in lobbying for legislative change on women's issues. (See Appendix II for the group's overview article on C-127, "Bill C-127: How did we get there? Where do we go from here?")

The work and discussions of the Working Group on Sexual Violence, Battered Women's Support Services and the Women's Research Centre have gained much over the years from the writings of other feminists, particularly Dorothy Smith, Helga Jacobson, Gillian Walker, Catharine MacKinnon, Sue Findlay, and Susan Schechter. (The bibliography provided in Appendix I includes the specific references for their work.)

In fact, the motivation to do this study and prepare this discussion paper can be summarized by comments from two of these writers. Catharine MacKinnon, in arguing persuasively for a feminist jurisprudence, "a new relation between life and law," states that "feminism has no theory of the state." (MacKinnon, "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: Toward Feminist Jurisprudence," Signs 8:4, Summer 1983, p.635) She contends that "lacking even a tacit theory of the state of its own, feminist practice has instead oscillated between a liberal theory of the state on the one hand and a left theory of the state on the other." (Ibid., p.642) She discusses the inadequacies of both theories and the consequences for women, particularly with reference to violence against women: "Liberal strategies entrust women to the state. Left theory abandons us to the rapists and batterers." (Ibid., p.643) Sue Findlay points out that the work of the Women's Movement is essentially political and must eventually grapple with the power of the state. She says "this will

require the Women's Movement to move beyond its preoccupation with women's experience to contextualize this experience, to locate it in the liberal democratic institutions and structures of society and to expose and rigorously scrutinize our traditional assumptions regarding the role and function of these institutions and the forces and interests shaping them." (Findlay, "The Politics of the Women's Movement: Lobbying Our Way to Revolution," p.4) Findlay contends that Canadian feminists must take on the task of "refining our understanding of the state and reassessing our political practice" - as, she notes, feminists in Italy, Denmark, England and the U.S. have begun to do. She cites our years of experience in "what could be called a working relationship with the state bureaucracy" (from lobbying for the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in the late 60s/early 70s to the consultation and advocacy work of today) as a basis we can use to develop our analysis of the state and its various institutions. Findlay argues that "our information is scattered among us, but we do have it!" (Findlay, "Facing the State: The Politics of the Women's Movement Reconsidered," p.6)

We agree that this task must be taken on and that women's groups and individual activists have the necessary experience and expertise to collate the information scattered among us into an analysis that will inform our strategies and guide our future work. This discussion paper is meant to be one contribution to that end.

1.B. Background Research:

In January 1983, the Women's Research Centre applied for funding from the Women's Programme of the Department of the Secretary of State to study the institutionalization of women's issues and to prepare a discussion paper on the topic. Funding (in the amount of $6,631) was received in April 1983.

Two researchers designed a study* which began with a review of articles and documents that addressed feminist work on the issue of wife battering and women's groups' interaction with the state and its institutions. From these readings and a review of the Proceedings from the Symposium on Family Violence and the Report of the Task Force on Family Violence (published in

* The second part of this study, which deals with the institutional response to the issue of rape, is scheduled for publication in the fall of 1985.

August 1977 and May 1979, respectively), we developed an interview guide and identified and interviewed several key participants in the United Way's work. The interviews focussed on the United Way Symposium and Task Force - the actual work, the process and the results - but also included questions on issue definition and development as well as participants' involvement in work on wife battering. In addition, we obtained and reviewed written and verbal accounts of the history of the United Way's involvement in social issues. We also analysed press clippings regarding the Symposium and Task Force as well as the minutes of Task Force meetings and additional articles and materials related to the topic of institutionalization.

Throughout the research our purpose was twofold. First, we wanted to describe and analyse the workings of the Symposium and Task Force in order to account for the questions, conflicts, and confusion that feminists had experienced. Second, we wanted to identify and discuss the connections between the specific United Way case and the nature of institutional response to women's issues generally. In addition to drawing on other feminists' writings on the latter topic, we have, over the two years since this project began, tested our assumptions and findings in countless conversations with feminists from across Canada.

We have concluded that the United Way example is not unique and that it raises issues and questions which are useful in clarifying the nature and implications of institutional practice. However, more needs to be done: All of us who must make decisions - either as individuals or as members of women's groups - about whether and how to work with institutions, on what terms and with what objectives and expectations, would benefit greatly from additional accounts of feminist experience with institutions as a basis for refining our analysis and informing our decisions.

2. Defining Terms

One of the major themes of this discussion paper is the significance of language (defined as words and their use*). Specifically, we show that the language used to define issues or to describe people or situations can tell us a great deal about the perspective and ideology that is being put forward. We contend that, particularly as feminists, we must questio the language and terms used to label or describe women's experience and concerns, compare their meanings with our understanding of the experiences being described, and try to "tell it like it is": we must try to define our terms and use words that are as clear and precise as possible rather than overly general, inclusive, and potentially confusing.

Women's Issues

Although the terms we're primarily concerned about defining in this section are those related to institutions and institutional practice in responding to women's issues, we want to begin by discussing the term "women's issues" itself.

According to the Oxford dictionary, an issue is a "point in question" or an "important topic for discussion." Therefore, a women's issue could be defined simply as any topic or question of particular concern to women.

However, as feminists we can refine the definition to reflect the fact that, while any issue may be of particular concern to women, women's issues are also statements about women's place in society. We suggest that feminism (that being a feminist**) means starting with women's experience, putting women first, making connections between our experiences as women, and analysing how women live in society. It means recognizing that women are oppressed socially and economically and that all of us as women are affected by women's oppression. (Of course it also means a commitment to working in whatever ways we can to end women's oppression.) As feminists then we would define a women's issue as an articulation or expression of some aspect of women's everyday, lived experience of oppression.

In addition to the term women's issues, we use several words in this discussion paper which are subject to interpretation - notably the terms

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* Unless otherwise noted, all definitions used in this section are taken from the Concise Oxford Dictionary.

** See Appendix III, "Towards a definition of feminism."

state and institution as well as ideology, professional(ism), expert, and objectivity. Rather than assume a common understanding of their meanings, we want to define and discuss these terms.

The State

According to the Oxford dictionary the state is an "organized political community." Beyond a literal, dictionary definition, however, there is considerable difference of opinion about what the state is. To some the state is essentially the government and its bureaucracy - the elected federal and provincial parliaments and municipalities and the agencies and apparatus set up to make and enforce the rules and regulations that structure society and organize our lives. To others the government is only one aspect of the state; the state is made up of a whole range of institutions - including the media, the church, the police, the army, the courts, the education system, trade unions, corporations and business, and the family. Any institution that has an ideological and/or coercive function is considered to be part of the state. Ideology is defined in Oxford as "ideas at the base of some economic or political theory or system."

If we start from our own experience as women to analyse what affects our lives, why our lives are circumscribed as they are, how and why there is violence against women or inadequate child care or job ghettos, we may isolate some aspects of the state that affect us or we may see the whole. One tendency is to focus on the individual institutions that directly touch our lives, such as a school or a union or the city or town council. Another is to focus on the larger institutions such as the federal government and perhaps overlook those institutions closer at hand.

We can deduce from the strategies and approaches women's groups use different views of what the state is. For example, some women's organizations focus almost exclusively on lobbying and negotiating with governments for legislation and policies to improve women's status and situations. This approach implies a rather narrow view of the state as government. Other groups apparently operate from a similar view of the state as synonymous with government but with very different results. The reasoning seems to be that government does not and will not operate in women's best interests; the state is responsible for women's oppression; and, therefore, women's groups must refuse to accept government funding or to expend effort on legislative change or changes in the policies or practices of the police or the courts or other state agencies. Some would go so far as to suspect

any individual feminist who works for a government or its agencies of being, at worst, a sell-out or co-opted and, at best, naive. Yet these same groups may do extensive work with the media or in schools to change attitudes and educate women, men, and children about the injustice of women's situation in society and the nature of women's oppression. Either the education system and the media are not considered to be state institutions or they are seen to be more open to manipulation, to being "used" to get a message across, to reach women and organize women.

Some women's groups have obviously decided that it is necessary to work for change on all fronts - for changes in legislation, in public attitudes, in economic policy, in the way health care, social welfare, and the criminal justice systems treat women, in the media and educational system, in unions, churches and community organizations, and in the institutions of marriage and the family. This suggests an all-encompassing view of the state as inclusive of virtually all of society's institutions. For many other groups - perhaps the majority - strategies have evolved and changed without any direct relation between an analysis of what the state is and strategy.

In this paper, we work from the premise that the Canadian state is more than government and its bureaucracy, that it is all institutions which serve to order and organize society and define what is appropriate behaviour in our relations with each other.

Of course, in defining the state it is also necessary to consider whether the state is patriarchal, capitalist, or both. We would agree with Sue Findlay that, "although there is certainly no consensus on how the systems and interests of capitalism and patriarchy interlock - does one have primacy? are they mutually interdependent? and when are their interests compatible and when contradictory? - it is becoming clearer as we analyse our experience on particular issues that they are both present in varying ways...." (Findlay, "Facing the State," p.7)

And, we contend, we can refine our definition of the state and find answers to the central and practical question facing feminists - how is society organized? - by analysing our experience of the workings of specific institutions, particularly as they respond to women's issues.

Institution

The Oxford dictionary defines an institution as a society or organization for the promotion of scientific, educational, or other

public object (or purpose). We assert that the purpose of state institutions is to uphold the ideology or ideas on which the state's economic and political system is based. Institutions are ideological structures which provide the framework for our lives, teach us how to think and behave and control us, as Dorothy Smith has pointed out:

> The work of creating the concepts and categories, developing the knowledge and the skills which transform the actualities of the empirical into forms in which they may be governed; the work of producing the social forms of consciousness in art and literature, in news, in TV, shows, plays, and soap operas -- these are built into institutions which are themselves an integral part of the ruling structure. Universities, schools, systems of broadcasting, publishing corporations and the like are the ideological institutions of the society. They produce, distribute and socialize people in the ideological forms upon which social organization depends.
>
> (Smith, "An Analysis of Ideological Structures and How Women are Excluded," p.1)

Accordingly, no one can be fully exempt from institutions and the ideology they uphold. Anyone who's examined sex-role stereotyping and conditioning knows very well how pervasive the traditional ideology of women's role in society is and how difficult it is to overcome our training to conform. Because we are all trained and socialized to adhere to society's dominant ideology, we are all to some extent "carriers" and perpetuators of that ideology.

Professionals and Experts

The more formal agents or administrators of ideological structures and institutions are professionals and experts, as the definition of these terms makes clear. A professional is, according to Oxford, someone belonging to or connected with a vocation or calling, especially one that involves some branch of advanced learning or science. Professionalism is defined as qualities or typical features of a profession or professionals. Similarly an expert is defined as a person having special skill or knowledge - most often taken to mean skill or knowledge acquired through advanced education or training. (The expertise gained by working in transition houses or rape crisis centres or in feminist organizing is rarely accorded recognition on a par with that of social workers, sociologists and the like.) It follows then that a professional or an

expert is someone who has been particularly well-trained (through "advanced" education) in the ideology of this society and thus, is particulary well trained to uphold that ideology.

Objectivity

Dorothy Smith and others have analysed professionalism and pointed out that objectivity is so highly prized in professional circles that it must be seen as one of the main characteristics of professionalism. Objectivity is defined as a distanced, external view, a view "uncoloured by feelings or opinions." Taken to its logical conclusion, it is the absence of a point of view at all. "Point of viewlessness" is hard to imagine - indeed we would contend it is an impossibility. Rather, what is considered an objective view is, in fact, a view that conforms to society's dominant ideology. (This would of course explain why feminists, advocates, and activists are rarely accorded status as experts or professionals: subjectivity, involvement and declared point of view are all potential or real challenges to professionalism and dominant ideology.)

In this paper analysing the Vancouver United Way's response to wife battering, we show how institutions function as ideological structures and use professionalism and objectivity as the tools of their trade.

The Institution of the United Way

Organizations like the United Way may not generally be considered to be institutions or ideological structures. We may see the United Way as a charitable organization that is intended to "do good" and that does not influence our lives, unless we are actually recipients of its money or support. Also United Way, particulary through local chapters of its large international organization, may seem familiar - we may know some of the people involved in its operation, they may be from community groups we've worked with. Therefore, it may be hard to see how the United Way is connected to the state or comparable in any way to the multifaceted, so-called "faceless bureaucracies" in office towers in provincial capitals or in far-away places like Ottawa. However, a critical examination of the United Way's history and its involvement in social issues places it more clearly in the institutional context.

For example, it is significant that the roots of the United Way in Vancouver can be traced to the business community's concern in the 1920s

to bring order and control to fund-raising for the many agencies* which had developed in the late 1800s and early 1900s: "Businessmen and members of the public...felt they were constantly being asked for donations without knowing how they were being spent." ("United Way of the Lower Mainland 1930-1980 - an informal history," pages unnumbered, publication undated) Accordingly it was the business community, as represented by the Vancouver Board of Trade, and service clubs - notably Rotary - which formed a committee and commissioned a study to examine the notion of "federated fund-raising" for Vancouver. Howard Falk of the Montreal Council of Social Agencies and the Montreal Welfare Federation was hired to conduct the study. Acceptance of his report and recommendations led to the establishment in 1930 of the Vancouver Council of Social Agencies, "the forerunner of United Way ." (Ibid.)

Falk's views on "the orderly financing" of social welfare were obviously supported by the business leaders of the day: he became the Council's first Executive Director and he also formed and ran the Vancouver Welfare Foundation to implement his ideas. Specifically he maintained that it was necessary to establish "a planning body to bring agencies together, to work towards the integration of their programs with government-sponsored services, and then, as need became apparent, to institute federated fund-raising." (Ibid.)

This organizational framework not only met the business sector's concern for order and control by limiting the autonomy and independence of those agencies which joined the Council, it also related the voluntary sector's programs to government services. In addition, Falk argued, this framework would result in "a body of educated opinion with status in the community such that it could not be ignored by government." (Ibid.)

From these beginnings, the United Way (in all its manifestations**) has maintained its connections with business and government and developed its status in the community. According to the "informal history" published by

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* These included the Vancouver "branches" of the Salvation Army, the Young Men's and Young Women's Christian Associations, the Boy Scouts and the Girl Guides, the Victorian Order of Nurses and the Canadian Red Cross.

** The organization's name has been changed many times over the years: from the first Vancouver Council of Social Agencies to the Community Chest (1944) and Red Feather Campaigns of the 1940s and 1950s, to United Community Services of Greater Vancouver Area (1966) to the United Way of Greater Vancouver (1974) and, finally, the United Way of the Lower Mainland in 1977.

the United Way, there has been a high degree of co-operation and co-ordination of services with "provincial and civic authorities": representatives of business are "loaned" to the United Way to work on the annual fund-raising campaigns; and all levels of government have commissioned or supported aspects of the organization's work on social issues. As a 1979 manual of its research department indicates, the United Way has endeavoured to attract and retain Board members who are "significant decision-makers in the community." (Social Planning and Research Department Manual, Oct. 1979, p.17) The United Way has established credibility - in large measure precisely because it represents business interests and because of its history of charitable efforts.

To its credit, the United Way also has a history of taking up controversial issues and a record of taking positions that are unpopular with government. In the 1930s it exposed charity rackets and encouraged the development of a government program to combat venereal disease; in the 1950s it documented the inadequacy of hospital facilities for the chronically ill and addressed the problems of drug addiction, alcoholism, and the need for services for working mothers and their children. In the seventies, the organization published reports on such contentious issues as family planning and housing and for several years it has issued annual reports on the inadequacy of social assistance rates. However, it is also true that in recent years this kind of work, which has given the United Way something of a progressive image, has been carried out by the organization's Social Planning and Research committee (SPAR*) with considerably less than full support from the United Way Board.

Although SPAR has been dominated by professionals, academics, and Board representatives, and accordingly has taken a traditional rather than a radical approach to social issues, its very existence is significant. As Gillian Walker has noted in her analysis of the United Way's work on family violence:

> Organizations like the United Way, as representative of the community (defined as people from all walks of life) are taking a bold stand when they take up an issue such as family violence and make recommendations as to how the system should upgrade its practices. They are going beyond their general role as conscience

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* It should be noted that SPAR is the committee of United Way that organized and co-ordinated the Symposium and Task Force on Family Violence.

> of and to the community, encouraging and co-ordinating philanthropy and determining the legitimacy of worthy causes or those deserving of community support.
> (Walker, pp.13-14)

Therefore, it's not surprising that SPAR has had to withstand repeated challenges from within the United Way. Internal restructuring and reorganization have been used to ensure the primacy of Board policy, to keep SPAR "in line" and to restrict its independence.

SPAR's survival has in large measure rested with funding from Health and Welfare Canada. For example, in the 1970s SPAR received a five year Health and Welfare grant with an additional three year "taper" which covered a portion of SPAR's costs. This funding enabled the Social Planning and Research committee to develop in a period of inflation when fund-raising was difficult. It also helped SPAR to have a degree of autonomy within the United Way and eased the conflict between the United Way's often competing functions of fund-raising and social planning. The Board could deflect criticism of SPAR's stands on issues by pointing out that that work was funded (if only in part) by the federal government and, therefore, was neither a drain on United Way funds nor entirely a reflection of United Way (i.e. Board) policy. Thus the United Way has had it both ways - SPAR's work has enhanced the organization's image in those circles where social relevance matters but SPAR's secondary status in the organization has been used in other circles to dispel concerns that the United Way is "rocking the boat" by taking stands on controversial issues. Of course, these structural constraints, coupled with the professional orientation of SPAR, have also ensured that taking up even the most radical issue is safe. The values of the mainstream of society dominate the organization and provide a filter to screen out any substantial challenges to the status quo.

In addition to controlling the social policy function of the United Way, this screening process also operates in the fund-raising work of the organization which is its major claim to fame and credibility. The purpose of the United Way is widely accepted to be the practice of raising money for charities, for the "less fortunate" in our society. However, if we ask basic questions about who is served by the United Way and to what end, we can see some of the values and ideology involved in the United Way's operation. Of all the less fortunate people, of all the agencies designed to help them, which ones does the United Way support and why?

In a Perception magazine article on "The Darker Side of Voluntarism," Ron LaBonté discusses what he terms "the corporate tax-deductible self-interest in voluntarism." He outlines the irony and the effects of having representatives of Canada's financial elite heading up United Way campaigns (citing the example of the Chairman of Royal Trustco acting as head of the 1984 Toronto United Way drive):

> Those whose economic behaviours create much social hardship donate time and money palliating some of the hardship, so distancing themselves from its creation and incidentally garnering bouquets of goodness. An oppressive social order is legitimated as charitable - not only legitimated, at times even enforced!
>
> (Perception, Vol.8:2,p.12 Nov - Dec 1984)

The United Way, by virtue of its image, confers a stamp of approval and a measure of credibility on those agencies (and issues) it supports. However, whether by giving or by withdrawing support, the United Way also "enforces" corporate self-interest and society's dominant ideology. For example:

> A few years ago the Thunder Bay United Way withdrew its $50,000 support for the community's Social Planning Council. The Council had just released a report, critical of reforestation policies in the region, which irked the CP Great Lakes forest company. Great Lakes was one of those corporations which shed annual largess on the United Way. A few hasty behind-the-scenes conversations and Presto! no more United Way funding for the Thunder Bay Social Planning Council and, a few years later, no more Council, period.
>
> (Ibid., p.12)

Given the wide acceptance of its image as a charitable organization that "works for all of us" (as the TV ads tell us), the United Way can safely take up even controversial issues or agencies and by so doing reinforce the impression of enlightened interest from the privileged, professional, or business sectors. But looking behind the United Way's image reveals an institution which represents dominant interests, an institution ideally constituted to function as a gatekeeper of the status quo screening out, redefining or softening those issues or agencies that pose a real threat to dominant interests. We do not suggest that

this is a deliberate plot or that anything more than normal bureaucratic functioning is necessary to accomplish this result. We do contend that the United Way represents not "all of us" but the privileged among us; that it is not just a giant charity doing "good works," but rather that it is a mainstream institution of Canadian society.

In this discussion paper we examine how the United Way responded to one controversial issue - the issue of wife battering which, as it is defined by feminists, represents a significant challenge to dominant interests in our society.

3. The Identification and Definition of Wife Battering:

"Wife beating has been condoned throughout history." In Wife Battering in Canada: The Vicious Circle, Linda MacLeod cites as evidence for this statement examples from the first known written laws, thought to date from about 2500 BC, from Greek and Roman societies, the Middle Ages, and Napoleonic times.(MacLeod, p.27) In the late 19th Century as part of social reform movements in North America and England, "feminists...forced recognition of wife beating as reprehensible activity, but it never gained recognition as a widespread social problem." (Brienes and Gordon, "The New Scholarship on Family Violence," Signs 8:3, Spring 1983, p.490)

It was not until the 1960s and 70s that the current Women's Movement brought problems like wife battering, which were previously considered personal, to public attention - in part due to feminists' renewed critical scrutiny of the family as a structure of domination.

The first Vancouver Women's Movement organizations of the early 1970s - such as A Women's Place, the Women's Health Collective, and Vancouver Status of Women (VSW) - received calls from women who were beaten by their husbands and tried to find ways to help them, including taking women into their own homes for temporary shelter and support. Women we interviewed who had been staff members at Vancouver Status of Women in those days said that calls would come to VSW's Ombudswoman from women "who had 'marital problems'; violence [as the problem] was identified later: we didn't have a label like 'wife battering' for it back then." As more women called, workers became "horrified at all these cases of women being beaten up by the man they lived with...it was happening to all kinds of women and they were trapped - they didn't have money to get away; even if they lived in West Van [one of the wealthier areas of Vancouver], they didn't even have bus fare."

In the spring of 1972 a Women in Transition Society was formed, primarily from the Women's Place group and VSW, to gather information on the incidence of wife beating and to develop plans and a funding proposal for a Transition House - which opened, after almost two years of organizing and lobbying, in December 1973.* A woman who was involved in those efforts told us about the opposition she and others experienced when they talked about wife battering and about starting a Transition House for battered women:

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* For more information on the beginnings of Transition House in Vancouver see "The Transition Process: A Feminist Environment as Reconstructive Milieu" by Jillian Ridington, Victimology 2:3-4, 1977-78, pp.563-584.

> I remember we had the first public forum on the issue at Christ Church Cathedral. We were accused of trying to break up the family. They said - "the women ask for it." There was reluctance to support a Transition House. And, men would get up and admit it and say "no Transition House in my neighbourhood or my wife will leave me and go there." It was a very emotional meeting!

This kind of opposition was commonplace and, more than 10 years later, still exists. In addition to "victim blaming" (e.g. the woman deserves to be beaten) and charges that feminists are "anti-family," it was not unusual to hear even sympathetic audiences minimize or deny the magnitude of wife battering in our society by questioning battered women's behaviour as "provocative" or "pathological," often culminating in that perennial question, "why does she stay?"

Clearly women's groups and individual feminists, by identifying wife battering as a problem and by working to establish transition houses for battered women, posed a threat to the status quo. As Jillian Ridington pointed out, setting up a transition house for the specific purpose of aiding battered women "implies that the problem is not only widespread, but that it is a social problem rather than an individual one. It also implies that such behaviour [battering] cannot be condoned, and that women have a right to leave men who abuse them." (Ridington, p.565)

The new services women organized had provided an opportunity for some women to come forward and say they'd been beaten by their husbands. By listening to those women, by believing them, and by taking action based on analysis born of battered women's experiences, feminists forced the previously hidden problem of wife battering into public view. As Susan Schechter contends in her book describing the American "movement on behalf of battered women":

> Only an environment in which women were organizing on their own behalf - a feminist political presence - could create and mobilize this new movement. No other explanation adequately accounts for the proliferation of services and reform in the 1970s.
>
> (Schechter, Women and Male Violence: The Visions and Struggles of the Battered Women's Movement, p.5)

The analysis of wife battering that feminists developed linked battering as a specific problem to the oppression of women generally. Ridington states that wife battering was a logical focus for Vancouver feminists in the early 70s because "the oppression of battered women is perhaps the most overt and

the most intimate of all the ways in which women are oppressed." (Ridington, p. 564)

Women's groups' early efforts to establish transition houses and bring public attention to wife battering were pioneer efforts, without guidelines or benefit of documentation of other feminists' work. However, by the mid-70s books like Erin Pizzey's Scream Quietly or the Neighbours Will Hear, from England, and Del Martin's Battered Wives, bore witness to the fact that other feminist groups had been organizing in similar ways at the same time. The articulation of an analysis of wife battering that feminists developed contained such radical concepts as women's economic and social dependence on men (Pizzey, p.106); wife battering as an example of women's domestic oppression (Smith, "Women and the Politics of Professionalism," p.20); women, as men's property, denied a will of their own, and subjugated to their husbands (Martin, p.28); the necessity of challenging the privacy of the family and the notion that "a man's home is his castle" (Pizzey, p.30). As early as 1974 Pizzey had concluded from her experience of working with battered women that alcohol is no excuse or reason for battering (p.85) and that, "whatever human beings do to one another, they never 'deserve' having their ribs kicked in or their noses broken" - conclusions that would be contentious for years to come. Susan Schechter notes that feminist analysis of wife battering was influenced at least indirectly by the "anti-rape movement" of the early 70s which articulated that "violence is a particular form of domination based on social relationships of unequal power" and "one mechanism for female social control." She adds that while "today this sounds obvious; ten years ago it was a revelation." (Schechter, p.34)

In a few short years, from the days of horrified women's centre staff first listening to women's accounts of their "marital problems" that had no label, feminists had worked from women's experience to expose the dimensions and framework of an issue that challenges some of the most fundamental values and institutions of society. And they had developed services to help women who were trapped by those values and institutions.

As a result of feminist work to bring the issue to public attention, by 1976 more traditional organizations had begun to recognize the need to explore wife battering. In one such effort, the United Way undertook "a pilot survey of incidences of wife battering in the Vancouver area" which consisted of sending questionnaires to community agencies, Family Court, women's groups, mental health centres, and alcohol treatment centres, etc. (See: Downey and Howell, Wife Battering: A Review and Preliminary Enquiry Into Local Incidence, Needs and Resources)

The study, by two women researchers, provided useful information on the extent of the problem of wife battering - a conservative estimation indicated that 5,000 women had been battered over a period of one year in the greater Vancouver area. The study recommended more support for transition houses and education for those in the helping professions to change their "blaming the victim approach." (Ross, ed., Proceedings From Symposium on Family Violence, pp. V-70-71)

In the same year, the United Way published another report that dealt with wife battering - The Social Service Role of the Police: Domestic Crisis Intervention, by Levens and Dutton.(This report was published in five monographs: the first two monographs were published in January and December 1976 respectively; the three remaining monographs were published between July 1977 and July 1978.)

Both reports provided useful information and the fact that the United Way had undertaken them suggested a welcome change from the reluctance to recognize wife battering as a problem or to support transition houses that feminists had encountered in the early 70s. However, (in retrospect, at least) the Levens and Dutton study has further significance. First the researchers are male professionals - one an associate professor of psychology and the other a United Way research associate. Second, their reports effectively hide wife battering under the inclusive category "domestic crisis," which the police use in their work (and presumably that was a reason for using the term, since the study does focus on police practice), thus shifting from the feminists' term and definition of the issue to a professional frame. And, third, the language of the reports is largely gender-neutral - it is hard to know from reading them just who is doing what to whom (for example, the term wife battering does not appear - instead various euphemisms are used such as, "domestic dispute," "husband-wife fight," "violent outbreaks between spouses"). These are points we will return to in subsequent sections of this paper, but in terms of this discussion of defining wife battering, the major concern is with the "professionalization" of the issue.

When Vancouver Transition House was beginning and the first staff were hired, they were deliberately chosen on the basis of "ability to empathize with women in crisis." The feminists involved in hiring deemed "relevant life experience, including having been a single parent, and/or having been involved in working with women or children" as the most necessary qualifications. "Since the house was conceived to be a supportive refuge, and not an institution,

women with backgrounds in traditional kinds of social work were not chosen." (Ridington, p. 566) The concern was "to ensure that no professional 'trip' would be laid on" any of the residents of this new service. (MacDermot, in Battered and Blamed, Appendix IV, p. IV-2) This is not to say that all professionals (or all social workers specifically) were automatically suspect or that research done by professional researchers was dismissed. However, an anti-professional view prevailed and for good reason, in feminist efforts to identify, define and deal with wife battering. As Schechter points out:

> Feminists and grassroots activists offered persistent criticism of professionals. At the start of the movement, professional arrogance and indifference toward battered women helped mold the anti-professional biases still operating in some programs [for battered women]. Feminists were the first to analyse violence against women as part of the power dynamic operating between men and women in a sexist society. By their persistence, feminists and grass-roots activists forced the words "battered women" into public consciousness. Professionals then moved in to claim violence as a mental health or criminal justice problem. The political analysis disappeared, was changed, or was considered beyond the scope of professional concern. (Schechter, p.107)

Schechter goes on to caution against "trashing" professionals and denying the contributions many have made. Nevertheless the problem of "professionalism" was and is real. It is not a matter of ascribing malicious intent or conspiracy theories. It is a matter of recognizing that education and training to be professionals and social scientists prizes neutrality, objectivity, and scientific, untainted knowledge. (See Walker, p.17.) And, as Breines and Gordon argue, "the narrow, intrafamily, gender-neutral perspective" so often employed by social service professionals and researchers "obscures the actual history of the feminist 'discovery' of violence against women and discourages analysis of the problem from a context of societal male supremacy ." (Breines and Gordon, p.508)

Traditional social agencies and the helping professions had known about wife battering for years. But they had known it as individual cases requiring medical intervention, counselling, and a mutual problem of husband and wife, or as resulting from social stress. Indeed, for centuries wife battering was not a "problem" at all but an accepted exercise of a husband's authority in marriage. It remained for feminists to believe battered women's stories, to

name the problem and to define it from the perspective of battered women themselves in the political context of women's social and economic oppression. It is this naming and defining that presented the real challenge to traditional institutions and societal values of neutrality, objectivity and the sanctity of the family. And it is, therefore, understandable that institutions, like the United Way, in trying to accommodate this "new" issue, attempted to absorb it into the framework of the status quo that they had been developed to uphold and preserve.

In the following sections of this discussion paper we provide an account of one institution's response to the issue of wife battering and we outline how institutional structure and ideology can function to redefine and professionalize an issue, obscure and undermine feminist work, and limit challenges to mainstream values.

4. The United Way Symposium on Family Violence

4.A. Framework for the Symposium:

In 1977, on March 9, 10, and 11, the United Way of Greater Vancouver* held a Symposium on Family Violence. According to the Proceedings from the Symposium, which were published in August 1977, it was held because "a number of agencies [were] concerned about the prevalence and implications of violence in the family"; because "close examination of the overall problem [of family violence] has been hampered by the lack of information and generally the low priority assigned to family violence"; because "recent local and national research combined with a growing public and professional awareness clearly pointed to the need for concerted action"; and, because, "the United Way of Greater Vancouver through its Social Policy and Research and Social Planning Departments proposed the symposium format as a beginning step for this action." (Ross, ed., p.I-1)

The objectives of the Symposium were to:

- Build public and professional awareness of the extent and serious nature of family violence;
- Develop and co-ordinate services to meet the needs of victims and perpetrators of violence;
- Exchange research and develop new proposals for identifying and treating problems for family violence;
- Identify the priorities and steps for action regarding family violence. (Ibid., p.I-2)

There are several significant points implicit in these statements of reasons for holding the Symposium. First, the central issue is defined as family violence: wife battering, per se, is not mentioned. Second, the impression given is that the concern about the issues stemmed from "agencies" and that "research" and "public and professional awareness" indicated concerted action was needed. No reference is made to the several years' work of women's groups in raising public and professional awareness of wife battering and in taking action to "meet the needs of victims." Third, the United Way's initiative in holding the Symposium is credited as a "beginning step" in identifying priorities and taking action on the issue - thus further rendering invisible the actions of women's groups, which had begun in the

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* The organization subsequently changed its name to the United Way of the Lower Mainland.

early 70s. Perhaps the objective of developing "new proposals for identifying and treating family violence problems" is not meant to denegrate women's groups' work - for example in starting transition houses; or perhaps it does indeed mean that, from the United Way's point of view, new and different approaches were needed.

Certainly women's groups recognized that more needed to be done, that transition houses could not be the entire solution to the complex issue of wife battering. Many women's groups, therefore, welcomed the United Way's Symposium as a means of bringing more attention to the problem. However, the formulation of the problem, evident in the rationale presented in the Symposium's Proceedings, represents a very different formulation from the one feminists had developed. And, among the feminists who participated in the planning committee and in the Symposium itself, there was uneasiness about why and how the United Way had decided to organize a conference on this issue. One woman observed that in the planning committee's discussions, "it was as though the United Way had discovered family violence and that they had decided it was a problem. Transition House women were discounted; they were there as tokens. It wasn't acknowledged that they were the pioneers." Another activist contends that, whatever United Way's motives were, in effect, "they were legitimizing the issue and putting it back into the hands of professionals."

Representatives of women's groups on the planning committee did find that some key decisions had been made (presumably by United Way staff) before the committee began its work. One member of the committee said the framework was already set: "They said, 'We're going to have this symposium; we have the money to do it; these are the terms of reference.... Help us plan it.'" She recalls, "it was announced at the first meeting, I think, that Murray Straus [the keynote speaker - described in the Proceedings as a 'leading researcher and writer on the subject of family violence'] would be there. He was the expert!" In addition, the term "family violence" was a given: "We didn't try to change it. We were trying to get a feminist perspective into it and we thought we could do that." Feminist involvement in planning the Symposium, therefore, became a matter of working for inclusion of feminist speakers and women's perspective in a framework that had already been set, with professionals identified as the experts, and with the issue redefined from wife battering to family violence.

Ostensibly, the United Way had simply decided to follow-up on the 1976 studies SPAR had sponsored, but there was also the "fringe benefit" of making

the United Way look, in one informant's words, "credible and relevant." A reporter for the Vancouver Sun who reported on the Symposium also covered a similar conference in Montreal and pointed out how "trendy" the issue of family violence was becoming:

> A cynical observer might have noted that some experts have a nice thing going by touring around and delivering learned speeches on violence in the family.
>
> "It's so relevant," noted one delegate from Ontario during a coffee break. "Studying the family is where it's at right now."
>
> (Vancouver Sun, Wed., June 22, 1977, Phil Hanson)

The Proceedings introduction justifies the United Way's decision to hold the Symposium by citing immediate support for the idea represented by the wide range of agencies and groups on the planning committee (e.g. the B.C. Police Commission, Vancouver Transition House, Vancouver General Hospital, Vancouver Status of Women, the U.B.C. Faculty of Law, and the United Way itself) and funding assistance from Health and Welfare Canada (the Non-Medical Use of Drugs Directorate); Solicitor-General Canada, Secretary of State Canada, the Government of B.C., and the Vancouver Resources Board. (Ross, ed., p.I-1) According to the Proceedings, "the two major indicators of the timeliness and appropriateness of the topic [family violence] were the individuals who made up the program and the registrants." The percentage breakdown of the approximately 400 participants shows participants from the professions dominated: 40% social work and planning representatives; 20% from corrections and the legal system; 10% each from the health and law enforcement systems; and 15% from women's groups. (Ibid., p.I-1) References are also made to "victims of violence" who attended the symposium.

4.B. Disagreements at the Symposium:

Included in the Proceedings is an "Informal Summary of Reactions to the Symposium." The author points out that participants were "not a homogeneous group of people." Though they did share "a concern for understanding and acting on the issues of family violence," they did not always agree on "how to take action to deal with the plight of beaten women and children." The author outlines various reactions to the Symposium noting "tensions" that surfaced: For "many," the Symposium was a "positive step in bringing together people

with different views and experiences and providing a forum for interaction and future action"; for "some the program gave inadequate consideration to the feminist point of view"; and, "others felt the Symposium was split between two groups. One group was described as scholarly (male) researchers; the other, as outspoken (female) activists. The first group was accused of looking at family violence clinically and distantly. The second group, some of whom were victims of violence, was accused of being disruptive." (Ibid., p.I-3)

The body of the Proceedings - which consists of verbatim transcripts of addresses to the plenary session, with any questions and answers that followed the addresses, and summaries of the Symposium's 20 workshops - contains evidence of "splits" or "tensions." However, the suggestion made in the Informal Summary, quoted above, that lines were drawn between males and females, activists and researchers seems superficial. While there is undeniably some truth to these characterizations, an analysis of the "different views and experiences" reflected in the Symposium shows that the "splits" or "tensions" were, in fact, fundamental political disagreements.

As noted earlier, approximately 85% of the Symposium participants were professionals - people who worked in the social welfare, health care and criminal justice systems. Professionalism, as Dorothy Smith has pointed out, is:

> ...an organization of relations separating us from those we seek to serve and setting us over against them as participants in a work of control which is integrated with the ruling apparatus of contemporary capitalism.
>
> (Smith, "Women and the Politics of Professionalism, p.21)

No doubt many of the professionals who came to the Symposium were there to learn about the issue of family violence in order to serve their clients more effectively. However, the training and structure of professionalism require a distancing and so-called objectivity that must influence even the most well-intentioned members of its ranks. Feminism, or the standpoint of women, "discloses the distinctive power relations of professionalism." To paraphrase Smith, these relations include those of hierarchy, the preservation of the authority of theory over the working knowledge of an actual everyday world, and neutrality, which "in its secret form means taking sides against those who take the side of the oppressed." (Ibid., p.22)

Of the Symposium's 20 workshop sessions, only five could be considered to have been based on women's perspective. These were: "Wife Battering: Priorities for Action"; "The Role of Women in Marital Relationships"; "Transition Houses: Refuges for Battered Wives"; "Local Research on Wife Battering"; and "Sexual Assault in Families." From the published records in the Proceedings of all the workshops, the differences in the feminist and professional perspectives are obvious. A clear indicator is language and vocabulary. For example, in discussions of child abuse the dominant terms were gender-neutral and seemingly objective: "child battering families," "families experiencing child abuse," and "abusive parents." (Ross, ed., p.IV-88-91) In discussions of family violence and the law, there was talk of "a family member who assaulted another family member," "victims of family violence," "domestic dispute management," and "involved parties." (Ibid., pp.IV-11,12 and 16) Simple words such as men, women, wives, husbands, male and female are notable in their absence from workshops and discussions led by professionals and notably obvious in workshops and discussions led by feminists. The use of supposedly neutral terms, which actually hide who is doing what to whom, predominated to such an extent that everday words like women and men became loaded political statements prompting defensiveness and uneasiness. In theory, perhaps, it is families that experience abuse. In the everyday world it is a girl or boy who actually experiences child abuse; it is women who are beaten by their husbands in so-called domestic disputes.

Significantly, there were moments of departure from the professionals' gender-neutral, objective language (though traditional theory remained inviolate in all but the women-led workshops and presentations). In a workshop on legal changes regarding family violence, all references to people were neutral until the discussion turned to a recommendation that police should lay charges in family violence cases. Then "women" surface - with the possibility that if police lay charges it might "let the woman off the hook." (Ibid.,p.IV-11) (The recommendation did go forward in spite of dissent.)

Sydney Segal, in his plenary presentation on "Child Abuse and Deprivation," (Ibid.,pp.III-46-64) also used impersonal terms - partly, it seems from his text, to avoid "stigmatizing the individual" and to be inclusive - it is all "we," he said, not "we" and "they." However, Dr. Segal regularly used the male personal pronoun to refer to victims of child abuse and plural pronouns to refer to assailants. A notable exception is found in a reference to sexual abuse of children under the heading "combination of causes." Segal stated

that we must recognize that a cause of abuse is the child herself: "a lot of the sexual abuse, a lot of the incest, is provoked by the child herself (it's usually a girl)." (Ibid.,p.III-54) It is noteworthy that the exceptions to impersonal and neutral professional terminology occurred when women or girls were being held responsible for their behaviour or blamed for the violence against them. These are more than matters of semantics; they are illustrations of the politics of language.

Martin Meissner has said, "an important form of ideological practice in communication is omission, a kind of naming or accounting which claims to be inclusive but leaves something out." This practice is ideological when there is a discrepancy between different accounts of a situation or experience that can reasonably be related to privileged interests - interests, particularly, in maintaining prevailing dominance relations (such as the oppression of women). And, since "visibility is a condition for influence," omitting women or wife battering and instead using supposedly inclusive terms, like family violence, is an ideological practice. (Meissner, "The Reproduction of Women's Domination in Organizational Communications," p.3) Clearly, it is in the interests of professionals such as social scientists, to claim to be inclusive by using neutral language - it supports the impression that they speak to and about all people and it covers over discrepancies between men's and women's experiences which might challenge or disprove their theories. It is in their interests for them to use gender-specific language in situations that uphold prevailing theories, such as victim provocation or victim blaming. Thus, what are characterized in the Informal Summary of the Symposium Proceedings as "tensions" between "clinical and distant" male researchers/ scholars and "disruptive, outspoken, female activists" are more accurately ideological and political disagreements.

The major example of these disagreements at the United Way Symposium is found in two speeches to the plenary session: the first is the keynote address by Murray Straus, Ph.D., Professor of Sociology at the University of New Hampshire, and co-author of Violence in the Family; the second is the "luncheon speech," presented the day after Straus' speech, by Gene Errington, M.S.W., M.A., then Co-ordinator of the Women's Research Centre in Vancouver, formerly Provincial Co-ordinator for the Status of Women during International Women's Year, and formerly Ombudswoman at Vancouver Status of Women. (Errington was one of two speakers in the Symposium's three plenary sessions who spoke from the perspective of women. The second was Del Martin, author of Battered Wives, who responded to a showing of the film Chiswick Two -

a documentary about emergency shelters for battered women in England. The other five speakers, including Straus, spoke about "violence in the family" generally, child abuse, or aspects of the criminal justice system's response to family violence.)

Straus began his keynote address by quoting what he called "one of the most fundamental laws of science" which suggests, "If you come across something interesting, drop everything else and study it." He said that his work on violence in the family was the result of applying that law. He proceeded to describe the findings of research done by himself and his colleagues on the extent and causes of violence in the family and concluded with an outline of "steps to reduce the level of family violence," drawing from a paper he had just completed regarding prevention of "the extreme form of family violence known as 'wife-beating.'" The steps he outlined focussed on preventing child abuse since, he said, studies show that a wife tolerates abuse from her husband relative to the extent she was hit by her parents as a child - thus, he constructed wife battering as a contributing factor in child abuse rather than dealing with it as a specific problem. Throughout, Straus used terms such as "intra-family homicides," "non-lethal physical violence between husband and wife," "physical fights," "husband-wife violence," and "violent episodes" - defined as "any act intended to cause physical pain or injury to the husband or wife, ranging from slapping to beating up." (emphasis added). He declared that the "hidden agenda" of his speech was "to show the power of social science to reveal aspects of the world which are a daily and critical part of our lives of which we are only dimly or not at all aware." (Ross, ed., pp.III-1-19)

Errington disagreed. In her speech the day after Straus', she noted that family violence is not an "interesting" subject but a horrifying one. She spoke of the failure of social science to describe women's experience, to locate wife battering on the continuum of violence against women, or to aid in understanding the situation of battered women. She argued that women "are excluded from the production of the concepts which govern our lives" and that women are the objects of study with the result that what science tells women about our situation does not match our experience at all. Errington challenged the gender-neutral terminology Straus and other social scientists use because it masks, abstracts, and disguises who is doing what to whom. She said such language suggests that violence is being "dispersed equally among the adults in the family..." when, in fact, to talk about "marital violence" is to talk about violence against women. She pointed

to the irony that this "de-sexing of language" is so prevalent in terms of marital violence but strongly opposed when feminists have proposed it in other contexts. Errington criticized the social service and criminal justice systems for failing to meet battered women's needs, citing actual examples of women's experience, and contended that these systems are, in fact, trying to keep the family together at all costs and upholding the husband's authority to beat his wife. She cautioned against using the Symposium to focus on the causes of family violence and concluded:

> I think we have two issues to talk about in the next few days. Men beat their wives because they are permitted to do so and nobody stops them, and women are beaten because they are trained and forced and maintained into dependence and nobody helps them, and those are the issues to deal with. (Ibid., p.III-73)

The reaction was swift: Errington was hissed during her speech but got a standing ovation from some segments of the audience. A conference organizer who had asked her to speak at the Symposium specifically on family violence and women, in part as a response to Straus, criticized Errington for being "too emotional." Errington recalled that, "He said I'd done straight emotion, that I should have known better. He was furious. But, women told me that I'd given them what they needed for the workshop sessions [in the Symposium] to turn the discussion around." One participant we interviewed said the organizers seemed to be "embarrassed for being connected with letting this woman speak." She added it was her impression that a lot of people questioned whether the examples Gene gave were true. "Some men felt she had attacked the whole male gender and responded by saying, 'well, I don't beat my wife.'...They were shocked that it was such a hard-hitting speech and they overreacted."

Several explanations can be found for the reaction, or over-reaction, to Errington's speech. Defensiveness and charges of emotionalism, man-hating, and even lying, are responses feminists commonly experience from those who seek to minimize the seriousness of the issue of wife battering. As noted earlier, to talk about violence against women, and to use everyday words like men and women, often precipitates defensive reactions. Del Martin, in her remarks subsequent to Errington's address, noted that the analysis Gene presented is a threatening one that prompts uneasiness and anger:

> ...some people were quiet and serious and some, mostly women, nodded their heads in agreement with what she was saying, but a

> large number of people, both women and men, snickered or glowered because what was being said is threatening to the very foundation of the patriarchal society and its value structure. (Ibid., p.III-77)

Another Symposium participant thought that many people were "offended by the speech...offended that the subjective, feminist version of the issue" was accorded prominence by being presented at a plenary session where they were a captive audience rather than in a workshop which they could have chosen to avoid. And, obviously, "a meeting composed largely of social workers, social scientists and representatives of various agencies" might well be expected to take exception to the "roasting" of their work that the speech contained. (Vancouver Sun, Friday, March 11, 1977) Furthermore, although Errington was widely recognized as an activist in the Women's Movement she also has professional credentials. She had participated in the Royal Commission on Family and Children's Law and she is a social worker. By taking a solid feminist position in her speech, she set herself apart from professionals. It may well be that she was, therefore, perceived by her professional colleagues to be "breaking ranks," betraying her professional status and behaving in an unprofessional manner.

By all accounts Errington's speech was a pivotal event in the Symposium. Del Martin is quoted in the introduction to the published Proceedings as seeing the Symposium "developing into two conferences by the end of the second day in response to the strong feelings evoked by Gene Errington's speech and the film 'Chiswick Two.'" (Ross, ed., p.I-3) Other participants said the speech "really split open the whole Symposium." "It clarified where the problems were, all the contradictions came into play from then on." "A clear understanding of the issue came from Gene's speech - I realized that feminists brought wife battering to light and it was being ignored, being made less visible." And, perhaps most important, by challenging the objectivity, abstractions, and gender-neutral language of the proclaimed experts, Errington had opened the Symposium to include women's perspective on wife battering.

This is most obvious in the Symposium workshops "The Role of Women in Marital Relationships," led by Del Martin, and "Transition Houses: Refuges for Battered Wives." In Martin's workshop, which immediately preceded the Transition House workshop, many women had expressed "anger and concern" at being denied an opportunity to express their opinions. They said the conference had been "dominated by professionals," with little chance for

input from those actively working with battered women, or from those who had personal experience of such violence. They noted that whereas discussion periods had followed presentations given by the male speakers, no such opportunity was presented after Gene Errington's speech, nor after Del Martin's commentary on "Chiswick Two."

In response to women's requests for a forum, Jillian Ridington, who was to chair the Transition House workshop, offered to reduce the time for the presentations planned for that workshop and use the extra time for a discussion period. Although the Proceedings do not include notes on that discussion period or the recommendations that were developed in it, the report on the Transition House workshop does point out that it was an important initiative, "...it provided a forum for women actively working to aid battered wives throughout Canada, as well as a few U.S. representatives." And, the workshop provided the "first opportunity anywhere for...joint work to take place" on synthesizing into recommendations the opinions of women "with the most immediate knowledge" of the issue of wife battering. (Ross, ed., p.IV-62-66) Perhaps the feminists at the Symposium would have created this opportunity without the impetus Errington's speech provided. But it is clear her presentation exposed implicit political differences and opened the conference to women's perspectives.

4.C. Summary:

The Informal Summary in the Proceedings of the Symposium states that "in retrospect, the tension between various groups represented at the Symposium was a positive force. It was natural and realistic that strong feelings and sometimes angry words would emerge from presentations on such a disturbing issue as family violence." (Ibid., p. I-4) Once again the use of the supposedly inclusive term "family violence" is misleading. Analysing the Proceedings and interviews with participants indicates that wife battering, specifically - not family violence - was the "disturbing issue" that prompted disagreement and emotional reactions.

The Informal Summary also states that the Symposium "exposed a gap between 'objective social science' and 'subjective personal involvement.' The Symposium also served to bridge that gap so that participants took a first step toward ongoing dialogue and understanding." (Ibid., p.I-4) In fact, it was not the Symposium per se but the feminists and women activists who participated in it who exposed a gap between theory and reality and

between "status quo" politics and the critical political analysis which comes from women's perspective on the issue. Further, there is little evidence in the Proceedings that the gap was "bridged" at all.

Del Martin is quoted in the Informal Summary as crediting John Hogarth's speech - the then Chairman of the B.C. Police Commission was the "dinner speaker" on the second day of the Symposium - with pulling together and focussing the participants by reminding them "to listen to one another and work together." Hogarth's speech was indeed more respectful of different perspectives on the issues than most preceding addresses. Yet the workshops, held on the third day of the Symposium, were forums where considerable disagreement was voiced and many participants apparently decided they could not "work together." It is clear that feminists opened up the Symposium and changed its structure - for example, in the Transition House workshop (outlined earlier) - to meet their needs and get some work done, thus making the Symposium useful for them.

Noting that the Symposium was intended to be "only one step in a process" the introductory section of the Proceedings concludes with the following list of "outcomes":

- The publication of this Proceedings;
- Formation of a Task Force on Family Violence under United Way of Greater Vancouver and funded by Health and Welfare, Canada;
- Action groups formed under the Task Force on wife battering, child abuse, legal reform, police role, and education, with possibilities for more working groups;
- A network of Transition House workers formed with meetings currently underway;
- Publication of a resource list of services for battered wives and abused children;
- and many more.

(Ibid., pp.I-4-5)

And, the final word is: "The Symposium is viewed as one of the more important events in Vancouver in 1977, with a potential that reaches across the country and into the future." (Ibid., p.I-5)

For many participants the Symposium was a productive and educational event. For example, one woman we interviewed said that to learn about wife battering was "a falling of the scales from one's eyes. It was three days of shaking. I knew about child abuse before, but...!" Another said

she got "caught up in the issue and in the politics of it" for the first time during the Symposium. According to our informants, the conference marked the beginning of involvement in the issue of wife battering for women who had been activists on other women's issues for years before. For some the crucial factor was identifying with the other women there: "the eye contact recognition with other women was a revelation"; and "it was so important to have participation of the victims - women who declared themselves." For others the turning point was Gene Errington's speech and the reactions to it. One informant said that she had, in fact, learned most from "the opposition to the issue."

Wife battering became much clearer for some by virtue of hearing the analysis presented at the Symposium. "I didn't realize then the services that would be needed and the reforms, but it was an analysis that hadn't been there for me personally. And it seemed like an immensely subversive issue in that, if it was unravelled, it would make sense of a lot of other issues."

While the Symposium undoubtedly served useful purposes it is important to be clear about its contributions and about the way in which its accomplishments are reported in the Proceedings. The Symposium Proceedings (particularly the introductory sections) papers over and tidies up the debates and disagreements that figured prominently in the three-day conference and gives United Way credit for initiatives that were not strictly speaking its own. (For example, the Proceedings' inclusion of "a network of Transition Houses" as one outcome of the Symposium minimizes the independent work the B.C. Federation of Women had done, prior to the Symposium, to develop a Task Force on Transition Houses.) This is a common practice for groups or institutions. Any organization which has received funding from government or other sources endeavours to write a report on how it spent the funds in such a way as to justify its work and the funding. However, as Walker has noted, "the production and dissemination of records, reports, texts and forms" is a significant mode of wielding power:

> The way they say what they say, the processes by which they are produced, how they are read and used, are all part of organizing and producing the way the world is understood and acted upon. By doing this work of organizing the world as it is to be known by the reader, documents also organize the reader into a particular relation to what is to be known.
> (Walker, p.4)

The Proceedings of the United Way's Symposium organizes what went on at the conference in an apparently fair and even-handed way. The inclusion in the Proceedings of transcripts of all the presentations and notes on all the workshops, ostensibly gives the reader the information necessary to make up her/his own mind about what went on at the Symposium. However, the framework for reading the texts is set by the introductory section of the Proceedings. It does not hide the fact that there were conflicts during the Symposium; but it does characterize them in personal terms as "tensions," rather than as the political disagreements which, in fact, they were. It acknowledges the work of feminists in the Symposium itself and in planning - but in a way that expropriates their work. The introductory section implies (particularly in quoting noted feminst author, Del Martin) that, in spite of the conflicts or short shrift given the feminist point of view, in the end, everybody was relatively happy. In fact, how could feminists have been dissatisfied with the Symposium when, it seems, we got "equal time"? Errington was given equal time to answer Straus and Transition House workers and other feminists did workshops. Their very participation contributes to the appearance of fairness.

The fact remains, however, that the Symposium would have been a quiet gathering, dominated by professionals, with an objective, neutral, seemingly inclusive and theoretical discussion of family violence, were it not for Gene Errington's speech, and for feminists' work on the planning committee and in the Symposium itself, which interjected the reality of wife battering into the proceedings. And, as we will show, the conflicts and disagreements did not dissipate; they were replayed in full force, during the life (and death) of the United Way's Task Force on Family Violence.

5. The United Way Task Force on Family Violence

5.A. Overview of the United Way's Task Force:

In this overview of the Task Force, we provide basic information on the "who, what, when, and how" of the Task Force drawn primarily from the Report on its work. In addition, we refer to several aspects of its work which we and participants have identified as problematic and which we take up in detail in subsequent sections of this paper.

In May 1977, just two months after the Symposium, the United Way of the Lower Mainland established a Task Force on Family Violence which was, according to the Report of the Task Force, "organized to implement the recommendations of the Symposium.... The objectives of the Task Force therefore included building public and professional awareness of the extent and serious nature of family violence, facilitating a co-ordinated multi-disciplined approach to the problems identified, and taking initial steps in priority areas." (MacLeod, ed., Report of the Task Force on Family Violence, p.1)

The term of the Task Force was May 1977 to January 1979. Although the Report does not include any information on the costs of the Task Force, a 1981 Health and Welfare Canada report listed a grant of $45,125 for 1977-78 to 1978-79 for "Follow-up to Symposium on Family Violence." (Dept. of National Health & Welfare, Annual Report 1980-81, "National Plan of Action - Towards Equality," App.II, p.iii)

The Report states that, as well as the Social Planning and Research (SPAR) Committee of United Way, forty different provincial and local social agencies, women's organizations, medical, legal, and educational services were represented on the Task Force and its working groups and committees.

The Task Force organized its work around two topics: child abuse and neglect, and wife battering - because these were "the two major topics examined at the Symposium, in current research in the U.S. and locally at SPAR." Four "working groups" and their committees met at least monthly and were co-ordinated by SPAR staff. Three committees were formed during the term of the Task Force - all three were committees of the Working Group on Wife Battering and worked on the topics of Support Groups for Men, Support Groups for Women, and Immigrant Families.

The Task Force Report itself consists of an introduction, including a discussion of seven "common elements" of family violence; an outline of the work and the recommendations of the Working Group on Wife Battering,

the Legal Working Group, the Working Group on Child Abuse and Neglect, and the Working Group on Education; and eight appendices. The appendices are a list of Task Force participants; a chart showing participants' "organizational membership" and the structure of the Task Force; reports on the "Pilot Project for a Women's Support Group Programme" and on "Support Groups for Men who Batter Women"; excerpts from the YWCA's November 1978 Proposal for Second Stage Housing for Battered Women; Response to the Children's Legislation Committee - regarding the November 1978 Proposed Family and Child Services Act; a Report of the Education Working Group on eight workshops on Family Violence; and an annotated list of the Task Force's Resource Material and Publications.

From the Report and from interviews with participants in the working groups and committees (including the United Way staff person who co-ordinated much of the Task Force's work), we obtained a long and impressive list of the accomplishments of the Task Force. The obvious and most tangible products are the resource materials and publications. These were produced through the Working Group on Education and are listed in Appendix VIII of the Report:

- Family Violence resource list for the Lower Mainland with telephone numbers and brief description of services for battered women and abused children. (Revised Fall, 1978)
- Child Abuse/Neglect Newsletter, distributed province-wide.
- Family Violence Information packet.
- Reprinted articles, handouts and bibliographies on the subjects of wife battering and child abuse.
- Legal Process for Battered Women (1979) - a handbook designed as a guide to family and criminal law and court procedures for people working with battered women.
- Report of the Task Force on Family Violence (1979) including Task Force recommendations.
- Media Productions: Media consultant Peg Campbell, under the auspices of the Task Force on Family Violence, produced the following:
  - A Sign of Affection? and Rule of Thumb: two half-hour black and white video tapes on the subject of battered women.
  - A series of ten half-hour programmes designed for radio and classroom use on family violence subjects, including legal aspects, sexual abuse of children, resources and recommendations for future action.

- A Common Assault: three 10 minute sound-slide presentations in six languages besides English describing social and legal services available to immigrant families, including emergency response, Transition House and Family Court. Pamphlets, also in translation, are available for distribution to viewers.

The interviews with participants provided additional information on some of these resources. For example, the first run of the resource list was 16,000 copies and it was reprinted three times. And, the booklet, "How to establish a refuge for battered women," published by United Way in January 1982, according to its author Flora MacLeod, "came out of the list of resources." In addition, as a result of reprinting articles, handouts, et cetera, the United Way became "something of a distribution centre or clearinghouse for Canada" and did mailings for transition houses in B.C. and an Ontario women's group, among others. (In the days when houses were relatively new and women's groups didn't have money or machinery for resource distribution, this was a useful function for United Way. However, it should be noted, when the Task Force ended, this function became a contentious issue - see Section 7 p.62 for further information.)

A related project of the Task Force was the preparation of newspaper articles on wife battering and child abuse which were sent to editors throughout the province for inclusion in community newspapers, with specific local information on transition houses to be added at the community level. These articles were generally well accepted by local newspapers and helpful to women's groups and transition house workers in smaller towns. The resources and media productions were considered by our informants to be useful teaching tools although the radio programmes were under utilised and those involved in the immigrant women's committee, who sponsored "A Common Assault," experienced major "funding hassles" - attributed to United Way's lack of clarity about funding for the project.

The Task Force Report itself has also been a useful educational resource - with 1,500 copies printed. (An analysis of the report is provided in section 6 of this paper.) The report contained 63 recommendations, most of which focus on changes in the policies and practices of government (particularly the B.C. Ministry of Human Resources, as well as the Ministries of Education and Attorney General), the police, and social agencies. The recommendations press for more funding for transition houses and services for battered women; training of police, justices of the peace, and court personnel; public education, including a stipulation that public education

materials be developed in minority languages; and research - on the incidence and prevalence of child abuse and neglect, on a comparative descriptive study of transition houses, and monitoring and evaluation of any support or treatment groups for men who batter.

Although many of the recommendations were, and still are, basic necessities for improving services and protection for battered women and abused children, some Task Force participants expressed concern that they reflected the United Way's preoccupation with governmental and agency initiatives at the expense of "actually getting basic work done at the grass-roots level." One woman said the orientation was that United Way had "a duty to present and tailor information to government and the world" through the press or to cabinet ministers, rather than recognizing the real work that women were doing on Task Force committees or at the community level.

In addition to the resource materials and publications, the committees and working groups did a considerable amount of work in the areas of education, immigrant women, and support groups.

According to the women we interviewed, one of the Task Force's major accomplishments was the organization of eight workshops in various locations in B.C. They were developed "along the lines of the Symposium" which meant that both child abuse and wife battering were covered. Part of the philosophy behind their organization was the use of "a local base and local people" - which "impressed the funders" of the workshops. The organizers encountered difficulties - particlarly related to working within the institutional structure of United Way. These problems are discussed in subsequent sections of this paper; but the workshops were, nevertheless, highly successful. The Working Group on Education also undertook "professional training" workshops with groups such as recreation staff at community centres, City Health personnel, Family Court Committees, Child Care inter-agency organizations, and agency personnel who worked with non-English speaking families. (MacLeod, ed., p.22)

The Working Group on Wife Battering, in addition to its work on Transition Houses and second stage housing, formed a committee to work specifically on "problems experienced by immigrant women." This committee did educational work with professionals; produced a pamphlet, translated into eight languages besides English, describing the services of transition houses; and worked with the Vancouver Police Department and the Equal Employment Opportunities Officer of the City of Vancouver to develop a recruitment programme for

bilingual police. The programme was being implemented, as the Task Force ended, and was receiving excellent response from ethnic communities. (Ibid., pp.12-13)

Furthermore, the Working Group on Wife Battering also convened committees focussed on developing support groups for battered women and for men who batter. In March 1978, two women, Gillian Walker and Joann Robertson, developed a pilot project for a women's support group programme and undertook a training group for leaders. Through the Working Group on Wife Battering an experimental programme for batterers was begun, and, by the end of the Task Force, five groups had been held. The support group work continued under the auspices of United Way beyond the Task Force's term. The difficulties involved in this work were never effectively resolved during the life of the Task Force and, in fact, resulted in the demise of the United Way's post-Task Force committee on support groups. (See Section 7 of this paper for a discussion of the support groups committee.)

Without minimizing the work of the other Task Force or committee members, it is clear that feminists and women's groups did a major share of the work and were responsible, in large measure, for the accomplishments of the United Way's Task Force. Certainly the volume of work done on several different aspects of the issue of wife battering is impressive. And it was the Working Group on Wife Battering that took the lead - all of the committees came out of the Wife Battering Working Group.

It was these working groups and committees, rather than the Task Force itself, that did the work, according to the co-ordinator of the Task Force for much of its term. She also pointed out that, in addition, "the legal and education committees focussed on wife battering mostly." While the introduction to the report of the Task Force says there were forty different agencies and organizations represented in the Task Force's work, clearly feminists and representatives of women's groups played the major role. (See Appendix I and II of the Task Force Report for an outline of participants and their organization affiliation.)

Given their prominent role and the amount of work they did, it may be hard to understand the dissatisfaction and criticism we heard in interviews with feminist participants in the Task Force and its committees. For example, informants said, "we always talked about pulling out" of the Task Force; "they [the United Way and the Task Force] didn't really care what the feminist perspective was - it was a token gesture in the first place to have feminists involved"; and, "we [feminists] really had no impact." In fact, these

comments reflect the difficulties feminists encountered in working within the framework and decision-making constructs of an institution like the United Way.

5.B. Who's in Charge?:

The Report of the Task Force on Family Violence, written at the end of its term, states that "the Task Force on Family Violence was sponsored by the United Way" and operated "under the auspices of the United Way." (Emphasis added; MacLeod, ed., unnumbered first page of Report, and page 1 of Introduction respectively.) To readers of the Report, these vague phrases could be taken to mean that the Task Force operated at "arm's length" from the United Way and was at least a quasi-autonomous body for which the United Way provided support and facilities.

It is not unusual for an organization to seek and receive funding for a project which then runs relatively independently of the sponsoring organization. Although the sponsoring organization is held accountable by the funders, a project funded in such a way may be allowed to function with a large degree of independence. This is what the women we interviewed, who had participated in the Task Force, expected the United Way's relationship with the Task Force would be.

Over time, particularly with regard to key hiring decisions, it became clear that, in fact, the Task Force was only independent to a point: the United Way exercised considerable control, but not consistently and not in all areas of the Task Force's work. For example, the committees and working groups were apparently allowed to define their own priorities, take the lead in recruiting members and they were "free" to do the work - such as the educational workshops. However, this work done by committees and working groups was, publicly, the United Way's work. On a few occasions they experienced what seemed to be "interference" but it was, according to our informants, hard to pinpoint. It is only by means of retrospective deduction and some members' challenges to United Way's decision-making authority in hiring, that a clear sense of the structure of the Task Force and its relationship to United Way emerged.

For the participants from women's groups, uncertainty about decision-making authority, about who was really "in charge," was a major source of difficulty. To track this difficulty, it is useful to examine how the Task Force was set up, its terms of reference, the membership selection process; the role of United Way staff; and hiring practices during its term.

5.B.(i) How the Task Force was set up:

The first meeting of the Task Force was held on May 5, 1977, at the United Way offices. Five people attended, in addition to the Co-ordinator of the Task Force who had been hired by United Way and who had invited the five present (and others who were not present) to be members of the Task Force. According to the Minutes of that first meeting, the composition of the Task Force was discussed and "suggestions made regarding potential (additional) representatives." Further, the Co-ordinator presented terms of reference for the Task Force which had been distributed prior to the meeting. These were discussed and "no corrections or additions were made." (Task Force Minutes, May 5, 1977)

Prior to the first Task Force meeting, preliminary work on both membership - i.e. categories of membership and individuals to fill the categories - and on terms of reference had been done by the Symposium Planning Committee, which met subsequent to the Symposium to review the Symposium recommendations, including one on the establishment of a Task Force. A planning committee member we interviewed said her impression was that the United Way had always planned to have a Task Force as a follow-up to the Symposium and would have gone ahead with the idea even if it had not been recommended by the Symposium. She also recalled that discussions in the planning committee about membership on the Task Force focussed on the need for "broad-based representation" (i.e. all appropriate agencies and organizations should be included) and that the terms of reference were essentially "laid on" by United Way. In other words, although these points were open for discussion, it seems some basic decisions had been made before the Task Force's first meeting and were not challenged.

Membership on the Task Force eventually included representatives of Transition House and other women's organizations, the child abuse teams of Vancouver General Hospital and the Ministry of Human Resources, the Vancouver Health Department, the B.C. Police Commission, the Ministry of the Attorney General, the B.C. Bar Association, the U.B.C. School of Social Work, Health and Welfare Canada, and the City of Vancouver's Social Planning Department, as well as the United Way's Social Planning and Research (SPAR) Committee. (MacLeod, ed., Appendix III)

One of the Task Force Co-ordinators commented that it was "a disparate group" with some holdovers from the Symposium Planning Committee. She noted, "it was important that women's groups and the community were

represented, because otherwise it would have been a hot house flower and wouldn't have meant very much." Although she was not the co-ordinator when the Task Force began (she was hired in October 1977 when the first co-ordinator resigned), her sense of it was that "most people were included if they wanted to work...I do believe it was open, more open than many people thought it was."

Among women's groups' representatives the impression that membership in the Task Force was not open stemmed in large measure from the absence of Gene Errington who, as discussed earlier, had been an important force in the Symposium. According to our interviews, Errington had directly expressed interest in joining the Task Force and believed she would be asked to attend. However, she did not receive an invitation or notice of when meetings would be held. Finally, on the advice of a feminist on the Task Force she "just turned up" on the assumption that it would be difficult to ask her to leave. She stayed on and chaired a committee on support groups. However, what seemed to be a reluctance to include her prompted uneasiness and distrust among some feminists on the Task Force.

The terms of reference of the Task Force apparently received little attention. The draft presented at the first meeting set membership at "a minimum of a one-year period with a self-evaluation after one year to examine the need for Task Force continuance for an additional six months." The draft provided a six point "general purpose of the Task Force" which, in summary, was:

1. To provide follow-up to the Symposium on Family Violence - including to attach to the proceedings a notice of the formation of the Task Force on follow-up, including the terms of reference, with an invitation to Symposium participants to join sub-committees of their interest and to take appropriate action in response to recommendations by: a) considering the recommendations; b) setting priorities on the recommendations proposed; c) determining strategies for implementation of those; and d) carrying out these strategies.
2. To act as a co-ordinating group between bodies and disciplines concerned with family violence; more specifically to bring together representatives of a limited number of professions and bodies concerned with family violence as a Task Force.
3. To report or take action on issues which are identified as areas of concern related to child abuse, wife battering, family violence and the law, and domestic crisis intervention by police.

4. To explore record-keeping systems of bodies involved in family violence situations.
5. To promote further research by the Social Policy and Research Department of the United Way on areas identified as priorities regarding family violence.
6. To serve an educative role regarding family violence aimed at: public at large; professionals involved in family violence situations; government bodies; individuals involved in family violence (i.e., battered wives, batterers, abused children, etc.).

The discussion at the first meeting focussed on the function of the Task Force, more than its purpose. It seems the statement of purpose was treated as guidelines and it was decided that working groups should be set up and "draw up priorities for action (based on recommendations from the Symposium, and the group's own concerns), ...to be presented for ratification at the next Task Force meeting." Essentially the working groups would take the lead - which they did - with the Task Force having responsibility "for the overall direction of working groups, preventing duplication of effort among working groups, identifying gaps not covered by working groups, and when necessary, determining how to fill these gaps." (Minutes of first Task Force Meeting, May 5, 1977.) This is the clearest written statement we could find of the Task Force structure. Significantly, it leaves a lot unstated - such as, how would conflicts be resolved and what control did the United Way have?

5.B.(ii) How the Task Force Functioned:

In practice, the Task Force served as something of a "rubber-stamp" and a forum for the chairwomen of the working groups and committees to exchange information about their work. In the words of one informant "it was not a big policy making body." Another Task Force member said "its function was to co-ordinate the committees' activities but it became just another meeting and just bureaucratic work. The only real work was done by the committees." There were, according to one participant, "about two Task Force members on each committee or working group...and each one looked for people to do the work, people who'd make a difference." The Task Force seemed to be low-key and relatively informal - a facilitating body for the "real" work being done in committee.

The Task Force was informal to such an extent that it didn't have a chairperson. The minutes of the first meeting in May 1977 record: "it was agreed that the meeting would proceed without the appointment of a chairperson." The minutes of subsequent meetings show that, for approximately a year, members of the Task Force took turns chairing meetings. The minutes of a Task Force meeting on October 10, 1978 reiterated that "the Task Force did not believe it necessary to elect a chairperson but will ask for a volunteer to chair the next meeting when monthly meeting dates are being set... [the co-ordinator] will continue to draw up agendas." It would seem volunteers to chair meetings were not forthcoming for, as the co-ordinator told us, "the Task Force refused to elect a chairperson so I ended up chairing and taking notes." There is no indication that this was considered to be a significant matter, perhaps because of the relatively small size of the meetings and the apparently informal atmosphere.

However, as the co-ordinator explained, it did make a difference: since the Task Force operated as a "committee of the whole" - without a chairperson, it was not represented on the United Way's Social Planning and Research committee. SPAR was usually connected to projects like the Task Force through the project's chairperson who, it seems, automatically had a position on the SPAR committee. Without a chairperson, the Task Force had no official link with the United Way Board, although "formally, the Task Force was a sub-committee of SPAR which is a sub-committee of the Board." The Board, of course, is the ultimate decision-making body of the United Way.

The Task Force was connected to SPAR, and thus the Board, through one Task Force member who also sat on the SPAR committee. According to the October 10, 1978 minutes, the Task Force agreed that this member would "report regularly to SPAR on Task Force work and to each Task Force meeting about SPAR activities." The acceptance of this somewhat informal link with the decision-making structure of United Way fits with the notion our informants held that the Task Force was autonomous, operating under the auspices of United Way but with independence.

Indeed the co-ordinator of the Task Force was also in what appeared to be a quasi-independent position. Because the co-ordinator's position was paid for by project funding from Health and Welfare Canada, the co-ordinator was not a United Way "staff-line position." As the co-ordinator told us this "could have been seen as a weakness or it could have meant more strength." If the ideal was to have an independent Task Force, over which

United Way exercised little if any control, it would be seen as an advantage for the Task Force co-ordinator to be one-step removed from the usual United Way decision-making structure. However, as Task Force participants learned, the Task Force only appeared to be independent, "we eventually found out the co-ordinator had to run all decisions through SPAR and the United Way people." And, therefore, both the co-ordinator's tangential position in the decision-making structure and the decision not to elect a Task Force chairperson (who could have participated in United Way decision-making) were weaknesses: they served to distance the Task Force from the United Way structure and decision-makers with real authority over the Task Force's work.

These structural facts of life were not clear to the women's groups' representatives we interviewed. They knew that the Task Force was "a complex structure"; however, embroiled in several committees with many concurrent projects on the go, they said they were confused about structure. Their priority was clearly to get the work done and structural considerations were, at least at the beginning, relatively inconsequential.

It was several months before experience and events demonstrated that, contrary to appearances, "the Task Force was an integral part of United Way and there were things we couldn't do as a result.... We'd all thought the Task Force had a life of its own...it was a real eye-opener to realize it didn't." The co-ordinator told us that "a sense of who 'owned' the Task Force was a problem...it wasn't made clear enough. I've learned to explain at the beginning of a project about SPAR and the Board, about the strictures on us." As noted earlier, the terms of reference of the Task Force certainly failed to make clear the strictures or the United Way's authority over the Task Force. Without a clear outline of the relationship between the Task Force and the United Way, even seasoned veterans of the Women's Movement were left feeling naive and left at a disadvantage as Task Force participants: "They [the United Way staff] knew what they were doing and the rest of us couldn't figure it out."

The consequences of this lack of clarity emerged throughout the Task Force's term. They drained the energies of those members who grappled with them and who tried to make the Task Force productive in spite of the obstacles.

The difficulties induced by lack of clarity about the Task Force's structural relationship to United Way were exacerbated by the role of staff

people who worked with the Task Force. One woman we interviewed said that most United Way representatives who worked on the Symposium and the Task Force were "good people, likeable, and co-operative. It was disarming." She added that "everything always seemed so reasonable" and therefore, "it was hard to criticize what was going on." However, this informant and others had many criticisms ranging from: the staff's attempts "to always be objective" meant the work "got watered down"; "you could always tell she [the co-ordinator] was 'playing the game,' balancing delicately to keep us from doing things that would upset the United Way"; "the co-ordinator was doing a professional job - protecting her agency"; and, staff "went around the committee [the Task Force] - it was hard to figure out how decisions were being made."

Clearly, these criticisms reflect difficulties of working with an institution which are more products of the institution's ideological framework and structure than they are comments on the individuals involved. And, women we interviewed, although they made stinging indictments of the United Way or Task Force staff, also said they recognized that the job itself was difficult. One informant concluded, "Some styles of work are difficult. I think they tried the best they knew how; but there are others who could have done it better."

In working with an institution, trying to keep it on track, and frustrated by vagaries of structure and the often hidden politics of committees, it is understandable to focus on the styles and personalitites of the individual representatives of the institution. It is often difficult to determine where to draw the line between the effects of an individual's "style" and the structure or policy constraints of the institution.

On the one hand, as Meissner points out, "individuals are agents of their organizations" - both in law and in the sense that what one communicates in doing one's job is assumed to be "what the organization says, means and holds." (Meissner, pp. 1-2) On the other hand, some representatives may behave and speak in ways other than those sanctioned or required by their institution. They may genuinely disagree with the policies and politics of the institution and work actively to change them. Activists and advocates, including many feminists, may work "within the system," both to try to change it and to make its resources accessible to groups "outside."

There is a fine balancing act involved for those on the "inside" and for those of us who work with them. What the United Way experience shows is the importance of both sides being as clear as possible.

5.B.(iii) Hiring a New Co-ordinator for the Task Force:

Confusion and uncertainty about the function and responsibilities of United Way staff and about the United Way's authority over the Task Force resulted in several conflicts between Task Force members and the staff.

In the fall of 1977, the woman who had co-ordinated the Symposium, and subsequently the Task Force, resigned. In an October 28 memorandum to members of the Task Force and working groups, the original co-ordinator announced the hiring of a new co-ordinator with a brief description of her background and qualifications. At the November 3rd meeting of the Task Force, this new co-ordinator was introduced to the group.

The minutes of that meeting show, under the heading "Direction of Task Force," that several members were very concerned about the appointment: One woman (who had applied for the job) submitted her resignation from the Task Force (her letter of resignation was read to the meeting) and another challenged the hiring decision, questionning its implications for both the direction of the Task Force and its decision-making structure. She asked whether there was "to be more of a research orientation to the Task Force in future" (given the new co-ordinator's research skills and the co-ordinator's job description*) and, "Why was no member of the Task Force involved in the interviews of applicants?" The original co-ordinator said she "had interviewed applicants as had the Executive Director of the United Way and the Director of Social Planning and Research on whose staff the co-ordinator is placed."

The meeting agreed that "it should be clarified if the objectives of the Task Force had been changed" and that a member of the Task Force should draft a letter to the Director of the United Way "strongly recommending that United Way policy be altered to include members of groups such as the Task Force in the interviewing and selecting of staff hired to work with such groups."

Although the hiring process and decision-making issues were not resolved (and surfaced again in the fall of 1978 - of which more discussion later), this meeting seems to show clearly that the Task Force was not really autonomous at all. However, for the feminist participants it was apparently

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*It should be noted that the co-ordinator's job description had not to our knowledge been changed. The research emphasis/component was present from the beginning. However, in practice, the co-ordinator and the Task Force had never focussed on research.

not quite so straightforward at the time. For them, the meeting did mark a turning point: they began to pay more attention to structure. As one of our informants explained, "we twigged to the idea that we needed to caucus.... We started meeting after each United Way meeting. We did a lot more analysis."

There were two aspects to the hiring decision that prompted feminists to caucus: First was the sense that the Task Force was being "short-circuited" and the realization that "the United Way structure was not so easy." The second was the United Way's rejection of a candidate for the co-ordinator position who had been a Transition House worker and a participant in the Symposium and the Task Force. According to our informants this candidate was characterized by United Way personnel as "too-feminist," "too radical," and "too closely identified with the issue of wife battering" to be hired as co-ordinator. The fact that this candidate and the other feminists involved in the Task Force had accommodated the United Way's "family violence" issue framework (clearly stated to include both wife battering and child abuse), and had been invited to join the Task Force in the first place by United Way staff, suggests that the United Way considered feminists to be acceptable in the controlled environment of the Task Force but not in a position of authority such as the job of co-ordinator. The process of hiring the co-ordinator also indicated that, although Task Force participants may have assumed some autonomy from the United Way structure, the United Way's Executive Director and SPAR actually held decision-making authority.

5.B.(iv) Selection of Resource People:

In January 1978, the Task Force's Working Group on Education ran its first educational workshops. According to the report of the Working Group (included in the Task Force Report as Appendix VII), the workshops, which were held in Veron and Vancouver, B.C., were successful. However, according to our informants, the workshops caused concern among some United Way and Task Force personnel and led to "a giant meeting to discuss 'man-hating' themes." Although the evaluation forms completed by workshop participants were favourable, one contained a comment that there had been "too much on male chauvinism" in the presentations. (MacLeod, ed., p.VII-20) This kind of comment - rather than being seen as a common defensive or avoidance response to wife assault - seemed to serve as a rationale for

calling into question the feminist presentations in the workshops. As in the case of hiring a co-ordinator, to be feminist was synonymous with "being too radical." Criticism of feminists was often couched in terms of their co-called "abrasive" personalities. And, members of the Education Working Group told us it was suggested that one of the feminist resource persons at the workshops would have difficulty getting future speaking engagements because, "she only had one spiel and we did not want to hear it again." There was increasing resistance from this point on to including overtly feminist presentations in Task Force sponsored workshops.

The significance of discrediting feminists as radical or abrasive is two-fold. As Meissner has noted: "What is said about you as a member of a category of persons can and does hurt you when the referential domain of what is said contains meanings which vilify and belittle you." (Meissner,p.2) It was not simply a matter of hurt feelings for the feminists so characterized; it was a means of limiting their participation in Task Force work and perhaps beyond. Further, as Meissner also noted, this kind of characterization can "have effects in behaviour (your own and others') in circumscribing you and your capacities as restricted or undesirable." It can make those who are labelled (and their like), defensive, more manageable, and easier to manipulate. No matter how "thick-skinned" one may be, the effect of what is essentially name-calling gives a clear message about acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and politics. And, insidiously, it can serve to encourage conformity and/or silence. There is no clear evidence that this process had this effect on feminists involved in the Task Force. However, it is clear that within the United Way framework, the attempt was made to circumscribe and limit the influence of feminists and their analysis.

Our informants recalled that the discrediting of feminist resource people was not direct; rather, the strategy seemed to be to use more acceptable "adult education and Ministry of Human Resources types" as resource people in workshops instead of using feminists. On other occasions, it was a confusing matter of an "outside" feminist perceived to have more professional credentials or to be less "radical" in her approach, being selected over feminist members of the Task Force who had been outspoken.

In one instance a member of the Education Working Group with proven skills and expertise was passed over for contract work, to prepare educational materials, in favour of a professional who had not been involved in the Task Force but who was active in the Women's Movement.

Since the Working Group had understood their colleague would do the work, it caused considerable consternation, and yet another resignation, when the United Way gave the work to the outside professional.

The feminists on the Task Force were in a dilemma - how could they complain about other feminists doing the work without being seen to "trash their sisters"? In addition, the problems related to selection and hiring of resource people raised once again challenges about who was really in charge of the Task Force and who had the authority to make decisions.

5.B.(v) Challenging the United Way's Decision-making Process:

On July 17, 1978, the Task Force discussed "United Way Hiring Practices," specifically the decision not to hire the Education Working Group member to prepare educational materials. Some Task Force members were "concerned that they be more involved in hiring of staff who will be carrying out Task Force work." It was agreed that one member of the Task Force would write to the United Way's Executive Director requesting that he and the President and the SPAR Chairman attend the August meeting "to discuss this matter as well as the Task Force mandate and Task Force relationship to United Way." The Task Force members had taken a similar decision nine months before under similar circumstances (i.e. the hiring of a new co-ordinator) but apparently nothing had come of it.

At the September 1978 Task Force meeting six "recommendations to SPAR Committee of United Way" were passed. Four of them dealt with questions of United Way and SPAR support for funding wife battering projects of community groups and Task Force committees*. Two dealt specifically with structure and hiring decisions following from the July meeting. They were:

1. That in future the relationship between volunteer groups and SPAR be spelled out to participants at the inception so that lines of communication and ability of the volunteer group to take independent action be clear.

2. That volunteer committees and Task Forces have input into the hiring of staff who will work with those volunteer committees.

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* These four recommendations dealt with proposed support for: a slide/sound production; the Support Groups funding application; and a proposal for second stage housing for battered women. As well there was a recommendation that questions around ownership and distribution of media materials produced by the Task Force be clarified.

The minutes of the October 10 Task Force meeting records what happened to these recommendations. Significantly the United Way Executive Director and President, and the Chairman of SPAR did not attend the meeting though the Task Force had decided in July to request their attendance. Either the Task Force's strategy changed or the officials refused the request. In either event, the Task Force did not have direct access to the United Way's senior decision-makers. Instead, a United Way and SPAR staff member, who was also a participant in the Task Force, had presented the recommendations to the Social Planning and Research Committee on October 4. He reported that the SPAR committee wished to review the first recommendation (and one of the funding-related recommendations) at later meetings. In the meantime, the SPAR committee had "agreed that guidelines for social planning activities of Task Forces and subcommittees should be examined both by SPAR and volunteer members of such subcommittees." (emphasis added) While this may appear to be an egalitarian response suggesting that Task Forces and subcommittees had a say in determining what the relationship to SPAR should be, it could also have the result of encumbering such groups with a difficult and potentially time-consuming task, thus diverting them from the work they'd come together to do. Given the problems the Task Force had already experienced due to lack of direction and clarity regarding United Way structure (which the recommendation was, in fact, designed to address), SPAR's response represented an abdication of its responsibility as the liaison between sub-committees and the Board, and suggests that SPAR did not consider confusion about decision-making authority to be an important issue.

With regard to the Task Force's second recommendation on hiring, "SPAR Committee agreed unanimously that a procedure of consultation be adopted when staff are hired to work with volunteer committees and Task Forces." In the absence of any details about what this consultation procedure might be or how it might be devised, this was an empty response to a serious and long standing problem.

However, there is no indication that Task Force members challenged either of SPAR's responses to the recommendations. In fact, it was at the same meeting, after receiving SPAR's report, that the Task Force once again decided it was unnecessary to elect a chairperson who, as outlined earlier, could have given the Task Force formal recognition in SPAR. Presumably the significance of not having a chair was still unclear to Task Force members. Or, perhaps it was late in the Task Force's term

and defeatism had set in. Whatever the reasons, this latest attempt to clarify and influence the United Way's decision-making structure and hiring authority related to the Task Force had no effect.

5.C. Summary:

There is a tendency among those of us who are outside institutions or government to develop conspiracy theories about how those organizations operate. In the case of United Way it could be assumed that the lack of clarity about Task Force structure was a diabolic plot based on a version of the "tyranny of structurelessness" that some early women's groups experienced*. In fact, just as there is no evidence that the Task Force's structural links with United Way were ever spelled out, neither is there evidence that those links were deliberately hidden. It seems more likely that Task Force participants were victims of normal bureaucratic functioning. As a bureaucrat of long service with federal and municipal government has suggested, governments (and institutions) don't have to set clearly repressive policy or structural constraints in order to control issues or interest groups; the absence of policy or the absence of clear decision-making structure and accountability serves them better. For if the rules of bureaucratic process are unclear, who can challenge them effectively? And, complex bureaucratic structure itself, coupled with lack of clarity about how it works, makes it possible, as Sue Findlay points out (in her analysis of the women's movement relations with government), for one part of the system to make a gesture it can afford to give knowing that resistance will be provided at other points in the system. (Findlay, "The Politics of the Women's Movement," p.17)

Ignorance about bureaucratic structures can have profound negative effects on women's groups' work. If nothing else, the experience of the United Way Task Force underlines the importance of determining, as best we can and as soon as possible in our work with institutions, the answers to the questions, "Who's in charge here?," and, "How are decisions made?"

The Task Force experience also underlines how important it is to be clear about the role and function of representatives of institutions - those working "on the inside." These representatives rarely have the authority or power as individuals to overcome or manipulate the fundamental nature

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* For a discussion of the problems encountered by structureless groups see: Joreen, "The Tyranny of Structurelessness," in Radical Feminism, Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine and Anita Rapone (eds.). New York Times Book Company, New York, 1973.

of bureaucratic structure - assuming they want to. However, if they are supportive of the positions of advocates and community groups, they can play a valuable role in providing information and access which will facilitate the work of groups outside the institution. Even if they are not sympathetic, the fact that the institutions they work for are usually public institutions - accountable to the public, including women - may provide openings for groups to require that they provide access and information.

As Sue Findlay has noted, "it is useful to have women working within the state particularly in a period when there is a political imperative" to address women's issues. They can be useful in pointing out to women's groups where and when there is a potential for change - based on their "insider's" understanding of the institution's disorganization or incoherence in dealing with dissident interests or demands. (Findlay, "Facing the State," p.62)

The role of a bureaucrat who wants to advance a cause or be an advocate consists of identifying or engineering the moments when the potential for change exists and informing advocates outside the bureaucracy accordingly so they can take advantage of the moment. However, the danger the Task Force experience illustrates is that women working inside the institution, while indicating support for women's issues, may be forced or may choose to serve the institution's interests. Further, an insider who supports women's issues and women's groups and tries to be responsible to groups outside the institution may well face diminished credibility within the institution. She will no doubt have to juggle her accountability to her employer with her accountability to others whose cause she supports. Most often the old adage rings true: he who pays the piper calls the tune. No matter how well-intentioned a bureaucrat may be, she is in a thank-less "middle" position. She cannot expect or responsibly require that outside advocates trust her because her job requires primary accountability to her employer and adherence to the institution's policies and values. Advocates must approach her with caution and a realistic assessment of what she can accomplish on their behalf. Unless it is carefully developed an insider's role can serve to obscure the nature of institutional response and contribute to a mystification of bureaucratic structure and values.

6. The Task Force Report

In analysing the Proceedings of the United Way Symposium we discussed the importance of documentary forms. (see Section 4.C, p.35) The Task Force Report is a further example of how documents can adjust and interpret what has happened during the course of a project to suit the interests of the institution in charge.

We've seen that feminists, in spite of severe obstacles, did an impressive amount of work for the Task Force. They were also instrumental in the preparation of much of the Report. However, in analysing the Report, we see that their work is framed, interpreted, and appropriated by the United Way and that the issues of family violence and wife battering are redefined to fit the interests and orientation the United Way represents.

6.A. Preparing the Report:

The process of preparing the Task Force Report was fraught with problems and took three months to complete. Gillian Walker outlined the initial process in her paper, "Doing it the United Way":

> The first draft of the final report, prepared by the co-ordinator, was rejected by the Task Force out of hand. It was a brief document which summarized the work of the Task Force, commended various public and private agencies for their co-operation, and made recommendations for the further take-over or the continuation of their responsibilities in the area of family violence. This was too blatantly pro-establishment for most of the Task Force members, professional or otherwise. It was at this stage that reports submitted to the Task Force by the working groups and projects were edited and the present document compiled.
>
> (Walker, p.25)

Those of our informants who were involved in the Task Force at this time said they had the impression that the co-ordinator didn't want to author a report the Board wouldn't like. One described the process as "a hassle - we went over draft after draft, trying to toughen it up. There was a mini-rebellion. We made some suggestions, wrote some of it and it was a little better. I was so fed up with it all by the end."

Since the members of the Task Force did have control over some internal decisions, even if they didn't have influence with United Way decision-makers, they were able to insist on a re-working of the first draft. Then they took on the job of producing the components, which were

edited and shaped by the co-ordinator into the final report. However, Task Force members did not have official access to the United Way Board, which had, of course, the authority to approve or reject the Report. Instead, the co-ordinator in what she described as "a mistake," went alone to the Board and had to overcome considerable hostility before approval was granted.

Board opposition focussed, significantly, on one line in the Report's introduction: "The family is a violent place." One executive member of the Board indicated he was "deeply hurt" by this suggestion. After an emotional discussion a compromise was reached, changing the sentence to: "The family can be and often is a violent place." This compromise - and one Board member's conclusion that, because of the high emotion in the meeting, "it's impossible for this Board to change a single word of this Report" - meant that the Board meeting did not review the Report beyond its introduction before approving it.

As noted earlier (section 4.A., p. 37), the substance of the United Way's Task Force Report is an introduction and a collection of summaries, with recommendations, from the working groups of their activities during the term of the Task Force.

The Report has been widely distributed and is still used by women's groups as a reference document. The recommendations are (unfortunately) still relevant - particularly those urging adequate funding for transition houses, second stage facilities, support groups for battered women, and training programs for professionals, as well as those calling for policy and administrative changes in the criminal justice and social welfare systems.

However, in spite of the Report's positive aspects, it is also an illustration of how institutions like the United Way can compromise and moderate "hot" issues, while seeming to advocate change.

6.B. Framing the Recommendations:

Feminist critics argue that the Task Force's recommendations are ineffectual, leaving the issue of family violence once again "in the hands of the government bodies and agencies who are enjoined to take up their responsibility for providing services and solutions" - a consistently unfulfilled responsibility the Task Force should have challenged more forcefully. (Walker, p. 8)

Even if the recommendations had themselves been more forceful, their impact would have been softened by the frame in which they were placed. The introduction states that the recommendations are not "a comprehensive or exclusive list of what needs to be done"; "they were not generated in any systematic manner"; and, they were "not necessarily derived directly from an analysis of research data." The introduction does accord the recommendations some status as having "a firm basis in informed opinion and the experience of professionals...practitioners... and...lay people." However, it emphasizes that "the work of changing attitudes and of changing institutions and procedures which reflect old attitudes is a long-term task." (MacLeod, ed., p.4) While it may only be stating the obvious to say that social change is a slow process, the implication can also be drawn that the targets of the recommendations can be excused if they do not act swiftly to implement them.

The potential strength of the recommendations is further compromised by the suggestions, which conclude the introduction, that "government must evaluate its performance" and that "private agencies and organizations, interest and citizen groups and women's organizations" must continue to monitor and evaluate "the delivery of services to those who are victims of family violence." (Ibid., p.4) These suggestions effectively soften any pressure in the recommendations for government action (providing for government the loop-hole of its own evaluation of its performance prior to taking action) and consign women's groups, activists, and private agencies to a continuing role of monitoring government programs. From the working groups' reports, which follow this introduction, it would appear extensive work had already been done, in the Task Force itself and before its existence, in monitoring and analysing government and agencies' programmes. Thus, it is somewhat ironic that the introduction serves to undermine not only the recommendations but also, by implication, much of the work of Task Force members. It is doubtful that this undermining was intended. It was more likely a result of what our informants saw as a desire to produce a report that would not "rock the boat" or upset the United Way.

Given this "soft" approach, it is possible for the introduction to the Report to include such apparently progressive statements as "we have learned that one cannot deal with this issue [family violence] for any length of time without seriously criticizing many of society's attitudes and values, its social welfare, legal and educational institutions"; "the family can be and often is a violent place"; or "family violence [is] a

major social problem." (Ibid., pp.2,4) In context, these statements actually serve to shore up the United Way's image as a liberal institution while posing little if any challenge to the status quo or to government or other institutions. Furthermore, directing the recommendations to government bodies and other institutions, while offering only limited criticism, reinforces the state's power and authority as the objective arbiter of social order. Women's organizations and community groups, while being accorded some recognition of their work in identifying the issues of wife battering and child abuse, are clearly relegated to continue in the roles of outsiders, gadflies, and pressure groups. A place for everything and everything in its place!

However, the Report's treatment of Task Force recommendations also manages to convey the impression that "the disparate views and intentions of a varied group of people gathered together under the auspices of the United Way" were taken into account fairly and even-handedly to "satisfy all concerned." (Walker, p.1) Thus, the United Way is presented as a unifier of political disagreement and diversity and as an initiator of social change. Certainly the view of our informants from the Task Force is that the United Way was not a "unifier" but rather alternated between ignoring political differences and pretending that they really were not substantial differences. And, in a galling but not uncommon form of revisionism, the United Way is painted as the body that took initiative on the issue of wife battering (or even on family violence). As we've seen, of course, the United Way undertook the Symposium and the Task Force, and included wife battering as a concern, in response to the increased public awareness and pressure initiated by women's groups and feminists. This is not to say that the United Way, or the authors of the Task Force Report, set out deliberately to create false impressions. Rather it is a matter of understanding the ways an institution's politics and ideology are conveyed and with what results. Susan Schechter in Women and Male Violence discusses this problem using the example of the Response newsletter produced by the Centre for Women Policy Studies (C.W.P.S.) in the U.S. Schechter points out that the C.W.P.S. is seen in many (particularly government and institutional) circles as a legitimate and useful Women's Movement organization which offers itself as an expert on battered women. However, it has "no grassroots constituency and offers no direct services to victims." Having the status of federal funding and being based in Washington D.C., the C.W.P.S. newsletter "can appear as an objective

reporter of national news" on women's issues. Schechter contends that the appearance is deceiving, that, "in its seeming neutrality, the Response newsletter consistently conveys a politic." She cites Response reporting in 1980 on programs for men who batter as an example of the problem of apparent neutrality which, in effect, conveys an undeclared but definite point of view. Supplements to Response on men's programs were printed and "in spite of grassroots concern, reprinted with no critical analysis of the ideology, politics, or treatement methodologies of the groups listed nor any criteria for evaluating them. The message conveyed nationwide is that all programs for men who batter are legitimate and helpful, a highly contested point.... The ideology presented is 'that we are all in this together to solve battered women's problems' and that we face no major disagreements or contradictions."

Schechter's summary of the impressions conveyed by Response could as easily be applied to the United Way Task Force Report:

> In the pages of Response, the diversity, disagreements, and importance of the grassroots battered women's movement almost disappear. Political concerns are laundered and social change is made to look as if it happens in Washington D.C. and within bureaucrats' offices.
>
> Some have described this process as co-optation of a movement. (Schechter, p.191)

7. A Postscript to the United Way Task Force

After the Task Force had disbanded, a committee focussed on support groups, which had begun during its term, continued to meet under the auspices of the United Way. This committee was charged with developing a joint proposal for support groups both for battered women and for batterers. As one step in proposal development, this committee struggled to reach some basic agreements on the nature of wife battering. After months of meetings the crunch came when grounding assumptions on family violence, which had been included in the Task Force Report (and which had been developed by Gillian Walker for a leaders training programme for support groups for battered women), were introduced as a possible "basis of unity." One of the assumptions began with the phrase "it is men who beat women." Although the statement goes on to say "there may be exceptions, but men who are in danger or in abusive situations have the economic option of leaving, which is less available to women," those involved in the batterers' support group programme could not agree with this assumption. In addition, feminists on the committee were beginning to have serious doubts about the approach taken by the leaders of the groups for batterers. Specifically, concerns centered on an apparently offender-absolving orientation in the groups, and a lack of evaluation or accountability. Several formal and informal meetings designed to resolve the disagreements and concerns were unsuccessful. As a result, several women involved in these discussions formed an ad-hoc coalition and on September 19, 1979 announced their withdrawal from the committee in order to develop a programme of support groups for battered women, independent of the United Way's committee. (This coalition became Battered Women's Support Services (BWSS) which has continued the support group work it began in 1980 and, in addition, has undertaken extensive educational work for professionals and the general public.)

The United Way's support groups committee disbanded abruptly after, literally, "passing the buck" to Family Services Society of Greater Vancouver: the United Way awarded money to Family Services for support groups and both the batterers' groups and the women's groups embarked on a lengthy process of negotiation with Family Services for funding.

As with the United Way's Symposium two years earlier, the disagreements in the United Way's support group committee were characterized by some representatives of institutions on the committee as well as by some representatives of women's groups as "tensions" between the men and women or the feminists versus male psychologists - though the divisions were, in

fact, political. It is also significant that problems with how to define the issue, to define what family violence really means, and who does what to whom, persisted even after the two year term of the Task Force.

According to the women we interviewed, the result of the feminists' challenge to the committee and their subsequent formation of BWSS was that the issue of wife battering was "taken back into the women's community," and out of United Way's "control."

In addition to the support group committee, the United Way also continued the clearinghouse or resource distribution function it had begun during the term of the Task Force. However, with the emergence of a B.C. Society of Transition House workers and increasing concern among feminists about the dangers of an institution such as United Way having control of information on women's issues and services, this function was called into question and gradually diminished. Nevertheless, United Way staff remained involved in the issue of wife battering; they continued to conduct research and, at the local level, were instrumental in the development of several transition houses. Although there has been lingering concern among some feminists about the orientation of United Way and the potential for institutions to usurp the role of community based women's groups, there has also been recognition that the transition houses United Way helped to develop are needed, as are more research and resources. In fact, when the social policy and research function of the United Way was threatened by Board challenges in 1983, several women's organizations and other community groups registered their support for the Social Planning and Research (SPAR) committee. SPAR survived the 1983 challenges and is currently involved in the issue of sexual abuse of children, among other issues.

8. The Nature and Implications of Institutional Response

While the United Way's Symposium and Task Force on Family Violence provide an illustration of the dangers inherent in the way institutions respond to women's issues, feminist participation in the work shows that some gains can be made. From the accounts we received, however, it is clear that working with an institution like the United Way is a constant struggle. It is a process dominated by trade-offs, compromises and "double-think" that drains energies and can confound even the most experienced activist.

In this section of the discussion paper we examine some of the implications of institutional response. Specifically we discuss how institutional response can function to redefine an issue - with particular emphasis on the dangers of amalgamating issues and on the significance of language and semantics. We also discuss the "pros and cons" for feminists of working with institutions. Finally, we review what the analysis of the United Way example indicates about how and why institutions respond to women's issues.

8.A. Redefining the Issue:

In providing background to the United Way Symposium and Task Force on Family Violence we reviewed the history of feminist work in identifying and defining wife battering and in bringing public attention to the issue. Throughout our examination of the United Way's response - from the keynote speech at the Symposium to the work and report of its Task Force to debates in the post-Task Force support group committee - issue definition emerged repeatedly as a significant and contentious point. Indeed, we contend that how an issue is defined is a central factor in how institutions respond and that issue redefinition is a subtle but critical feature of institutional response which warrants further discussion. From the United Way example we see, in particular, the negative effects of grouping (even apparently related) issues together and the importance of paying close attention to the language we use or accept in defining issues.

The following paragraph, from a 1982 Women's Research Centre publication, represents one attempt to define wife battering from the perspective of battered women and of feminists who have worked with them:

> Wife assault consists of physical, psychological and/or sexual violence committed against women by their husbands. It is a crime - provisions in the Criminal Code of Canada make it clear that such an assault is against the law. No one has the right to assault another person. No one deserves to be beaten. Analysis of the specific circumstances of wife assault indicates that the violence is not only unwarranted by the woman's behaviour but is, in fact, incidental to it. Wife assault is a reality in our society because men have the socially ascribed authority to make the rules in marriage; and because violence against their wives is accepted, in the eyes of society, as an appropriate instrument of control. The social and economic structure of marriage, as an institution in which women are dependent on men, requires this assignment of authority to men.
>
> (Women's Research Centre, A Study of Protection for Battered Women, p.5)

Several additional points could be added to this definition to reflect the knowledge derived from years of work by feminists to understand the problem and help women to deal with it. Notably, feminists have identified society's protection of the unity and privacy of the institution of the family as a major obstacle for battered women themselves and for those who would intervene. In addition, feminist analysis has exposed both misogyny and women's economic inequality as interconnected roots and perpetuators of wife battering, rape, pornography and other forms of violence against women.

Most, if not all, of these aspects of the definition of wife battering had been articulated by feminists when the United Way's Task Force was operating in the late 1970s. Certainly Transition House workers, among others, had been effective in exposing some of the common myths and misrepresentations about wife battering that sought to deny or minimize its seriousness and prevalence and that constructed wife battering in victim-blaming and offender-absolving terms. The analysis put forward by feminists and activists was becoming increasingly clear and comprehensive but it was not widely accepted or reflected in institutional and governmental policies or practices. The issue was still considered by the general public, policy makers and many social scientists as a "new problem." As bureaucracies began to address this new problem, they relied primarily, as they often do, on traditional social science to explain the problem and point to solutions. Although feminists were sometimes included in

the process (for example, by the United Way) or consulted by various bureaucracies, the framework for considering the issue was established by the institutions themselves and they usually set the focus of enquiry as family violence rather than wife battering specifically. The United Way Task Force Report illustrates some of the consequences of using this frame, and the difficulty of maintaining the centrality of women's experience when such a framework is used.

8.A.(i) Effects of Amalgamating Issues:

The United Way Report states that the Task Force organized its work around child abuse and neglect and wife battering because these were "the two major topics examined at the Symposium, [and] in current research in the U.S. and locally at SPAR." (MacLeod, ed., p.1) The term "family violence" is repeatedly used as an inclusive term covering both these issues. To some Task Force participants, "family violence" was an innocuous term: "it was simply a way to include both wife battering and child abuse together under one heading."

The introduction to the Report outlines elements reputedly "common to both problems" as a justification for including wife battering and child abuse under "family violence." Prefaced by statements that "one of the outcomes of Task Force activity was a growing awareness of the scope and interrelated effects of family violence" and "resource persons increasingly recognized certain elements as common to both problems," the following "common elements" are listed with a brief discussion of each:

1. The family can be and often is a violent place;
2. The pervasiveness of family violence;
3. The social and legal effects of family membership;
4. The cyclical nature of family violence;
5. Pregnancy and family violence;
6. Alcohol abuse and family violence; and,
7. Intervention in family violence.

(Ibid., pp.2-3)

On the positive side, the discussion of these elements does include some useful and accurate points. For example, Murray Straus is quoted as describing violence as "the ultimate resource to back up [the husband's] position as 'head' of the family"; alcohol abuse is rejected as an explanation or an excuse for wife battering or child abuse; and "violence

in the family" is stated to be a problem of "all cultural and social backgrounds, ages and income levels," thus challenging a popular myth that "it only happens in lower-class families." However, unchallenged in the discussion is the over-simplification that family violence is generationally perpetuated (i.e. that children who witness or experience violence in their own homes are more likely to be victims or perpetrators of violence in their adult relationships); no questions are raised about the exceptions to this theory nor about the different impact on males and females. Further, child abuse and wife battering are said to be "directly related in the documentation of increased attacks on women during pregnancy, attacks which include kicking and punching the stomach." (emphasis added) These attacks are labelled as "intrauterine child abuse" - in what must surely be a classic case of rendering women invisible, inconsequential and valueless except as bearers of children.

This latter example also illustrates one of the central problems in grouping together the issues of child abuse and wife battering: women and wife battering get short shrift. One of the Task Force participants we interviewed noted that "child abuse was the more legitimate issue and took more of the focus" (in the Task Force's work). Another said, "wife battering was hiding behind the skirts of child abuse." As Del Martin pointed out in a speech to the United Way Symposium, given the opportunity, people will tend to focus on child abuse, in part to avoid dealing with wife battering:

> When I first started research for my book, Battered Wives, I found that when I mentioned the subject, people quickly turned the conversation around to that safer subject of child abuse. The implication is that children are young and innocent and should be protected, but the wives are adult and blameworthy and, therefore, deserve the abuse they receive.
>
> (Ross, ed., p.III-77)

In addition, Gillian Walker contends that emphasizing the commonalities between wife battering and child abuse and grouping them under the heading of family violence obscures what is really going on, obscures the differences between the particular experiences and needs of abused children and battered women, and impedes our understanding of what is happening in the lives of women and children:

> If we can even gather who does what to whom in these "instances of family violence" they can only be explained in terms of the deviance,

> breakdown or pathology of the family or the individuals concerned, or in the most recent theories, as a "maladaptive interactional pattern." We cannot recover from "family violence" as a concept what is going on for women and children who are harmed.
>
> (Walker, p.16)

Further, this approach directs us to see the family as the "thing" which is violent, thereby diverting our attention away from men who beat their wives and women who are beaten and towards the study of the family as an entity. One Task Force participant we interviewed suggested it is dangerous to focus on the family as an entity or organism because doing so accords the family protection as "a unit greater than its individual parts - so the analysis that follows is that you, the individual, the battered woman, can't break out."

Susan Schechter has used an American example to show the dangers and errors of this emphasis on the family and the lumping together of child abuse and neglect with wife battering. She cites a statement made in 1981 by the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect (NCCAN):

> With data indicating a considerable correlation of spouse abuse with child abuse and neglect, it would be both cost effective and treatment effective to combine funding and programs for child protection and spouse abuse in a new framework of family violence.
>
> (Schechter, p.195)

The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, a grassroots organization of hundreds of battered women's programmes, opposed the NCCAN proposal. The Coalition re-affirmed their concern for child abuse but effectively challenged the accuracy of the data NCCAN referred to, as "simplistic, grossly exaggerated and scientifically disputed," and pointed out that "child abuse and violence against women are different phenomena with different historical roots." The Coalition also outlined why combining funding and programs for women and children should not be done:

> A major goal of child protection services is to keep the family united, hopefully free from violence. Our goal is to support a woman in creating a violence-free life for herself and her children in whatever way she chooses.
>
> (Schechter, p.324)

The Coalition argued for "mutual respect for differences and autonomy in these areas," the absence of which would "turn battered women into

the problem that social services try to treat. (Ibid., pp.324-325)

Clearly, grouping wife battering and child abuse under the heading of family violence is not simply a matter of semantics. It runs roughshod over the important distinctions between the issues, with serious programatic implications - particularly for women. The obvious advantages for the state and its institutions are cost-efficiency, continued reliance on existing "remedies" and services, and little need for change.

Breines and Gordon found in their study of "The New Scholarship on Family Violence" that, not surprisingly, this practice of amalgamating these issues is very common and that feminist analysts predominate among the few who reject the practice:

> Non-feminist (but not necessarily antifeminist) analysts tend to view the problem (often called, not wife beating, but spouse abuse or marital violence) as a gender-neutral or at least as a mutual problem of both sexes.... Most non-feminist sociologists emphasize similarities between child abuse and wife beating both in their patterns and causes and in their remedies. Indeed, these scholars argue that treating the problems separately may obscure their commonalities.
>
> (Breines and Gordon, p.507, emphasis added.)

Those responsible for framing the Task Force's work in terms of family violence can be seen then as followers of the prevailing wisdom and as products of their social science perspective and training. One participant in the United Way's work postulated that the family therapy background of Task Force initiators meant it was inevitable that the issue of wife battering would be defined "as a family problem rather than as a problem of power relations or a problem for women particularly."

In addition the substitution of family violence for wife battering is one of a number of characteristics of what Linda MacLeod has described as "bureaucratic reality." She has argued that: "wife battering is not an acceptable description of the issue for policy makers. It is persistently subsumed under 'family violence,' 'interspousal violence,' etc...., with a strong focus on the impact on children, rather than women." MacLeod added that other characteristics of bureaucratic reality include: "reliance on professionals for leadership on the issue" - and a failure to recognize women themselves and women's groups as experts; the definition of wife battering in "largely psychological terms - as the product of faulty interaction" - with one result being maintenance of "the

privacy of the family and the dependence of wives"; and, "a response which isolates the issue of wife battering from the fundamental issue of inequality" and women's economic dependence. (Ontario Status of Women Council, "Brief on Behalf of Battered Women," pp.13-14)

In fact, defining an issue in psychological, interactional terms also suggests the issue is not a proper concern of government at all but, rather, a personal matter for the individuals involved to solve, perhaps with some assistance from the "helping professions." Patricia Morgan, in an article entitled, "From Battered Wife to Program Client," sees such approaches as features of "social problem management through the capitalist state [which] serves to depoliticize political questions." She contends that "what mainstream social science has characterized as social problems...are potential political bombshells to the system." She is also critical of Marxists who have "ignored these more problematic investigations leaving mainstream social science free to legitimize the state's ownership of social problems through their narrow explorations of problematic populations, or symbolic meanings of societal responses, instead of the larger structural issues." (Morgan, p.21)

Catharine MacKinnon has argued that "the woman question," however sympathetically it is addressed and in whatever context - be it social science scholarship, Marxist theory, or the capitalist state/bureaucracy, - "is always reduced to some other question, instead of being seen as the question, calling for analysis on its own terms." She also notes that most commonly, "in what has become near reflex, women become 'the family,' as if this single form of women's confinement...can be presumed the crucible of women's determination." (MacKinnon,"Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: An Agenda for Theory," pp.525 & 527)

Nevertheless, some strategists would argue that it is politically advantageous to link a women's issue, such as wife battering, to a more legitimate or accepted issue, such as child abuse or family violence. Play From Strength, produced for the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, is a handbook on political action strategies for women's groups. It suggests that, in defining an issue, "look at how your concern affects the public interest" and cautions that "personal anguish or outrage has to be put aside for a moment." (emphasis added, Kome, p.7)

Problems with this strategy can be found in an analysis of the issue of family allowances in Britain, in Change, Choice and Conflict in Social Policy. The authors contend that government considered the concept of family

allowances to be "a vexed question until the Second World War" when "family allowances were seen to impinge upon other issues as well, such as the management of the economy...." As the issue became linked with the "legitimate" problem of economic management, "it was made more legitimate in the process." (Hall, Land, Parker, Webb, p.477) However, this enabled the government to avoid dealing directly with the issue of poverty which was the real problem behind family allowances. Thus, amalgamating issues to gain legitimacy may well result in greater conformity to the state's agenda rather than action on the issue as originally defined by activists. In addition, this strategy reinforces the state's authority to determine which issues are legitimate and which are not. Furthermore it is a limited strategy: beyond a certain point an individual issue's chances of being dealt with will be reduced by its amalgamation with other issues. (Ibid., p.491) When this point is reached, one question becomes how to extricate the specific issue from amalgamation. A further problem for feminists is that women's issues are rarely, if ever, considered deserving of analysis as legitimate issues on their own terms; rather the usual tendency is to subsume them automatically into other issues. Women's concerns are most often considered to be "private" matters not in the "public interest." Therefore, the amalgamation of women's issues with so called legitimate, larger issues will almost inevitably mean women's issues get lost.

8.A.(ii) The Significance of Language:

The very language that is used to define or redefine women's experience and women's issues is a major problem. The term "family violence," which the United Way used, may seem innocuous at first - but, as we've shown, on closer examination the difficulties with it become obvious. Feminist activists and theorists have tried to develop language and terminology that "names" women's experience and reflects it more accurately and specifically than that used in traditional social science and bureaucracy. For example, "wife battering" is preferred to family violence (or spouse abuse, domestic dispute, marital violence, et cetera) because it communicates two key aspects of the problem: one, that what we're talking about is violence against women, it is women who are beaten by their husbands; and, two, that the institution of marriage - common-law marriage included - is central to the problem. Similarly, the term "incest" has been rejected by many as an outmoded and inaccurate term in favour of "sexual abuse of

children" or, as some would prefer, "daughter rape." The Women's Movement has also promoted the usage of non-sexist or gender-neutral language and terms (chairperson rather than chairman, worker versus workman, et cetera), which serve to include women and challenge the traditional view that "man" means women too. However, attempts to name women's problems and experience more specifically can be undermined by the use of gender-neutral terms. It can be argued that, in many situations - particularly in talking about violence against women - gender-neutral terms let men off the hook, hiding the fact that it is men who beat women or implying inaccurately (as with terms like "spouse abuse") that violence is equally distributed among husbands and wives/men and women.

This matter of language is complex. Language is a method of expression and it is one means of organizing society. As Dorothy Smith has pointed out in "An Analysis of Ideological Structures and How Women are Excluded": "Images, vocabularies, concepts, knowledge and methods of knowing the world are integral to the practice of power.... Women have been largely excluded from the work of producing the forms of thought and the images and symbols in which [society] is expressed and ordered." It is men's perspective which has dominated the production of language, vocabulary, thought, and images for it is men who hold "the positions from which the work of organizing the society is initiated and controlled." (Smith, p.1) What this means for women and for the way women's experience is talked about and labelled in our society is that, in Catharine MacKinnon's words, "the perspective from the male standpoint enforces women's definition, encircles her body, circumlocutes her speech, and describes her life." MacKinnon adds that "the perspective from the male standpoint is not always each man's opinion, although most men adhere to it, nonconsciously and without considering it a point of view, as much because it makes sense of their experience (the male experience) as because it is in their interest. It is rational for them." (MacKinnon, "Feminism, Marxism, Method and the State: Toward Feminist Jurisprudence," p. 636 and f.n.)

Of course, it is not rational for women: men's perspective does not include or describe or make sense of women's experience. However, as MacKinnon notes, men's perspective is rarely acknowledged as <u>one</u> perspective; on the contrary, through men's control of ideological structures, the male standpoint has become "the ostensibly non-involved stance, the view from a distance and from no particular perspective...." (MacKinnon, "Feminism, Marxism, Method and the State: An Agenda for Theory," p. 538) The male perspective

has become objectivity itself, the absolute reality and description of the world, the objective standard for defining experience.

It is no accident that objectivity, a supposedly distanced view, and gender-neutral language dominate traditional social sciences, professionalism and institutional frameworks. (In the exception that proves the rule, gender-specific language may be used in the rhetoric of victim provocation and victim blaming theories. See, for example, our analysis of Straus' speech to the United Way Symposium, in Section 4.) "Wife battering" is not readily accepted in this frame because it excludes men except, by implication, as perpetrators of violence against women. "Family violence" (and similar terms) is acceptable because it includes men as innocent members of violent families, obscuring the fact that it is men who beat women. Furthermore, from objectivity as the standard follows the treatment and view of women as objects, isolated from the circumstances and relations of women's actual experience. In a paper entitled, "Using the Oppressor's Language," Dorothy Smith analysed how this works, using the example of wife battering:

> This is a method of using language which makes up a little bundle, a little package, out of instances of the lived world. We go around in our professional capacities working in this way. I might go around in my professional capacity as a sociologist and do studies of the Battered Wife. I would go out into the world and I would find samples. It would be like a botanical enterprise, walking out into the fields - as we did in my youth, picking flowers, and bringing them back to school to draw, to press in my book and write a description. In some such way I would walk out and pick samples of the Battered Wife and bring them home. I would put them in my book and write about them. It is an odd way of working. We take this - what shall I call it - a something? We lift this entity which we have called the Battered Wife out of actual lived experience and the social relations which organize and articulate it. We section the lived world to produce this entity.
>
> (Smith, p.8)

Smith describes this as a "sectioning method of the oppressor's language," which enables the professional, the social scientist, the institution "to set aside everything else" such as women's economic dependence or the trap that marriage can be for women. The Battered Wife becomes an object to be studied; women's experience is objectified.

It is an insidious and pervasive problem. Women, as well as men, are products of such ideological structures; we are educated and trained

and governed by institutions that view the world and the people and problems in it according to the objective (male) standard. Is it any wonder that, even as feminists we have such difficulty naming our experience in a way that avoids the traps of objectivity, objectification, and neutrality?

8.A.(iii) Summary:

Feminist definition and analysis of wife battering begins with women's experience and asserts that it is men who beat women, that they do so because they are allowed to, because the family/marriage is considered by society to be a private institution in which one must rarely, if ever, intervene, and because violence is accepted, with few exceptions, as an appropriate means of control to uphold men's authority over women. It also asserts that misogyny and women's economic dependence on men are mutually reinforcing. What follows from this analysis are services and programmes like transition houses, created and run by and for women, based on women's experience and on believing women; recognition of the interconnectedness of violence against women and women's inequality in society; and analysis and work focussed on other aspects of violence against women, such as rape, pornography, and sexual abuse of children, etc.

Institutions - for example, the United Way - begin with mainstream social science approaches, traditional political theories, and bureaucratic perspectives (based on the former approaches and theories) and define wife battering as individual pathology and faulty interaction within the inviolate institution of the family. They do not deem women's experience of wife battering to be worthy of analysis and action on its own terms, nor do they accord status or respect to those who do, i.e. feminists and activists. What follows from this approach is a definition of the issue as family violence, subsuming women's experience into a more general frame, worthy of "public" interest; a definition that obscures who is doing what to whom; that reframes political issues as social problems, thus minimizing the inherent structural challenges; that fits more closely the institution's and the state's existing problem-solving apparatus; and that ultimately makes women's situation invisible. This approach effectively serves to protect the status quo, the existing political system, and its structures and institutions. Institutions can do all this without appearing to be acting out of self-interest which, of course is what they are doing. Rather they give the appearance of being fair and responsive upholders of the greater good - including women's!

The dilemma for those of us who see reasons to work with institutions - to change them and/or to appropriate their power and influence for our issues - is how to do it without losing our issues, without our issues being "institutionalized" in the process.

8.B. The "Pros and Cons" of Institutional Response:

One of the central questions we face as feminists is what can we realistically expect to accomplish by working with institutions and at what price. The feminists we interviewed did not decide to work with the United Way out of some faith that the institution was altruistic or committed to improving women's lives. Rather they were motivated by the possibility of "using" the United Way's credibility and its resources to advance the issue of wife battering.

One woman told us the issue needed "a P.R. push" - the public and professionals had to be educated about wife battering. Another said, "the United Way had credibility and more resources than women's groups did to present the information and do the education. We thought we could use them [United Way] to get the issue covered - if we were strong enough." The United Way's apparent interest in family violence and the name of United Way represented an opportunity for feminists to have access to people and settings that "we hadn't been able to gain entry to before." This access, in turn, was seen as a key to changing attitudes and government policies if the United Way would take up and advocate the changes feminists had identified: "We believed we'd be heard if the United Way said it, we'd be heard by government and things would improve for battered women."

Sue Findlay, in her analysis of the Women's Movement's relation to the state, discussed what she considers to be "a curious disjunction between women's growing awareness of just how profound our oppression is, how resistance seems to keep pace with our every new strategy and insight, and what appears to be an utterly naive faith in our liberal democratic institutions to respond to if not initiate reform when made aware of our oppression." She contends that among feminists "there is a rather serious inclination to ignore how our oppression is maintained and the role that the state plays in this maintenance." (Findlay, "The Politics of the Women's Movement," pp.2-4)

It would seem that the feminists involved in the United Way's work on family violence were not "utterly naive." They did have practical reasons

for working with the institution - but these reasons were apparently based on assumptions that the United Way could be manoeuvered into advocating changes battered women needed and that this would in turn influence other institutions, particularly governments, to respond in a progressive way to feminist demands filtered through the United Way. These assumptions are not ill-founded: it seems to be simply common sense that, as the authors of Change, Choice and Conflict in Social Policy put it, "the prestige, expertise, or power of the sponsors will influence the fate of an issue." And, there is evidence to suggest that, "Where an issue constitutes a challenge to government...and is advanced from 'outside' [the government], its recognition is likely to be resisted or ignored.... The closer to government the point of origin [of a demand] the better the prospects [for recognition and positive response]." (Hall, Land, Parker, Webb, pp. 500,501) Clearly one way (some would argue, the only way) to gain legitimacy for an issue is to force or persuade institutions, including government, to take it up and act on it. However, as we've seen there can be negative as well as positive results from institutional response.

The women involved in the Task Force provided evidence of gains they'd made by working with the United Way (in addition to the accomplishments listed in the Task Force Report and outlined in this paper). They said Task Force work "gave wife battering a profile, some legitimacy," which translated into funding for educational workshops throughout B.C. and thereby enabled Vancouver women working on the issue to make connections with the women in smaller communities. Other gains took the form of increased media attention to the issue of wife battering and interest from social service and criminal justice system professionals. These were considered to be valuable dividends, particularly at a time when, according to one informant, there were no women's groups in a position to do this work on their own.

Of course even the most positive assessments of the worth of working with the United Way were balanced by reservations. Our informants cited the difficulties they experienced in trying to keep the Task Force "on track" as a serious problem because the struggles over process and decision-making diffused energy and diverted attention that would have been better focussed on the issue of wife battering. One woman argued that "we may have succeeded in raising consciousness about violence as a problem in our society but feminist analysis of wife battering was incidental to it, not central [to the awareness]." Similarly, another woman pointed out that "we had to deal always with their [the United Way's] framework and the

professionalizing of the problem of wife battering." Others feared that feminists' involvement with the United Way created false credibility for the institution by giving the impression that "something was being done" and that the United Way was doing it when, in fact, "women's groups have done the real work on wife battering, not the United Way." From our interviews it seems the debate about whether the feminists or the institution gained more is not resolved. On the one hand there is the view that "as feminists, we helped ourselves more, we gained more credibility, than we helped them [the United Way]." On the other there is the view that, "it's clear these institutions don't work for women" and, "the United Way didn't make any difference for the issue, except that some male psychologists are now getting big bucks to do 'traumatic bonding'* workshops." Further, on the matter of funding, there was concern that "the money that went to the United Way for the Task Force could have been used much more effectively by grassroots women's groups."

One point of consensus however is that no matter how much feminists may have gained "it can all slip away so easily...there are whole new traps along the way"; and, "you have to start all over again everytime" with each institution and with each "new" issue.

Informants also discussed whether feminists have any options in deciding to work with institutions. Specifically, with the Task Force, the reasoning was: "they were going to do it anyway with or without feminists, so we decided we had to stay involved and have at least a little impact." It seems women's groups are regularly faced with this kind of "no-win" situation that requires us to be what could be called "feminist firefighters." The scenario usually consists of a government or a specific agency announcing hearings or indicating it will now respond with a task force or committee or a study to an issue groups have lobbied them to address. Feminists then have to decide whether it's worth the effort to fight for representation and inclusion, to write another brief, make another presentation. Often the decision to make the effort is based as much on a fear of what will happen if women's groups <u>don't</u> participate as it is on any optimism that real gains can by made by participating.

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* "Traumatic bonding" is a theory based on the notion that a captive person becomes emotionally attached to the captor. It has been used in relation to wife battering as one way to account for battered women's alleged passivity, implicit in the often asked question, "why does she stay?"

In the days of the United Way Task Force, some groups maintained that feminists had to "play the game," (as one informant characterized working with governments and institutions), because the Women's Movement was fighting to have its issues and its very existence recognized and treated seriously. And, as Sue Findlay has pointed out, the state is "always a potential terrain of struggle" because it is "constantly being called upon to recognize new forces [such as the Women's Movement] and to reorganize hegemony [the supremacy of the dominant ideology] to incorporate them...." (Findlay, "Facing the State," p.59)

However, with more government attention and institutional response to feminist demands, the dilemmas and the difficulties may well increase, rather than decrease. More so called institutional "initiatives" mean more fires to fight: more in-depth analysis of the issues is required, more development of strategies specific to new situations, and more potential (experience unfortunately shows) for ill-advised, if not downright dangerous, policies, legislation, and programmes.

Whether struggling to be recognized or dealing with the problems recognition can bring, women's groups are often forced to juggle our own priorities, to extend ourselves to meet our objectives of providing service to women or organizing and educating, and still respond to the opportunities, whenever they arise, to influence governments and institutions. Needless to say, women's groups do not set the agenda or control the timetable.

The feminists we interviewed who'd worked with the United Way, spoke strongly of the need for a set of "guidelines or rules" that could be used in "playing the game," guidelines they didn't have and tried to devise as they went along. "We need to be clearer about what we can expect from institutions, what can happen, and, when to bail out." The United Way experience contains lessons and insights - if not guidelines per se - that may prove useful in future work. In the final sections of this paper, we generalize from the United Way experience to summarize the nature and implications of institutions' responses to women's issues and we outline some considerations for feminists and women's groups who want to take advantage of the opportunities institutional response to women's issues may provide.

8.C. How Institutions Respond:

From the analysis we've presented in this discussion paper of the United Way's response to wife battering and the parallels between that

work and other institutions' responses, it is possible to outline some of the main characteristics of institutional practice.

At the risk of over-simplifying, the scenario goes like this:

The history of feminist work to raise the issue of wife battering indicates that an initial response by the general public as well as social service agencies and other institutions is a denial of the seriousness of the problem and an attempt to minimize the issue. (Significantly, denial and minimizing are two of the characteristics Ganley has identified as typical of many batterers' response to wife assault. See: Ganley and Harris, "Domestic Violence: Issues in Designing and Implementing Programs for Male Batterers," p.5.) When feminists are successful in forcing recognition that there is indeed a problem of serious proportions, institutions and their agents proceed to study the problem for themselves. As well as (at least implicitly) undermining feminist work in defining and raising the issue, the "study strategy" enables institutions to reclaim the turf, to appropriate the issue to an institutional framework. An added advantage to them is that this approach will also enhance the institutional image by making it appear there is concern about the problem and that something will be done. Inevitably the studies will be done by professionals or experts designated by the institutions. Most often these will be people well-trained in the ideology the institutions uphold; on occasion they may lack professional credentials but will have demonstrated an acceptance of or an adherence to that ideology.

The studies will claim to be objective, neutral, and distanced; they will be essentially theoretical rather than empirical. Accordingly, the language used in the studies will be gender-neutral and it will come as no surprise that what was initially defined as a women's issue is found to be a problem for men and children too! The research will rest on a belief in "the power of social science to reveal aspects of the world... of which we were not aware." (Ross, ed., p.VI-19) In fact, institutional research will most often show how the issue or problem can be dealt with by society's existing problem-solving apparatus, without radical changes being required. One recommendation will almost certainly be a special committee or task force to fine-tune the existing system and/or to examine the issue further and/or to increase awareness of the issue (as it has been redefined by the institution).

If feminists persist (as feminists have been known to do!) in defining the issue from the perspective of women and persist in challenging

institutions to change, we will be characterized as radical, emotional, subjective, unprofessional, man-hating, unreasonable, or worse - but, some of us will be invited to join the committee! Having been so labelled, however, our influence will be effectively limited and we will probably be out-numbered on the committee by more reasonable, objective types. Nevertheless we will be expected to work hard, to provide information to the institution on the "real world" of the community, and perhaps even to represent the institution on occasion. In addition, we will have to decide how much consciousness-raising to do inside the committee and how much time to take for caucuses outside it in order to be clear about our objectives and keep on track.

The committee's terms of reference and decision-making structure may be a "given," the usual constraints anyone would expect of an institutional framework. Or, participants may be asked to help define them. Chances are good they'll be vague, subject to interpretation. Participants may be encouraged to spend a good deal of time trying to sort them out. Feminist participants might face division in their ranks: some wanting to be clear about who's in charge and about the rules of the game (these women may be dismissed as "process junkies"); others wanting to get on with the work. The key decisions about the work may never be discussed in the committee - after all, the staff of the institution has to take some responsibility. If any of these decisions are discovered, some committee members may suspect a plot. Probing will reveal, however, that in most cases no plot exists; rather it will be found the bureaucracy of the institution is functioning in its usual fashion. Out of frustration and fatigue, we may decide the institution has taken control of the work and we'd best lower our expectations and settle for damage control and a few small gains, including the degree of legitimacy gained because the institution took up the issue at all.

Documents the institution produces to report on its "initiatives" (never "responses"!) can be expected to reframe and redefine the issue feminists first identified. The language of these documents will also be gender-neutral, objective, vague. Any disagreements or political differences that emerged in the course of the work will be ignored, glossed over, or cast in interpersonal terms. The documents will report great accomplishments and congratulate the institution for fearlessly identifying a problem and taking action to deal with it. Feminist

contributions will be subsumed in the process. Other institutions will be challenged to act on the issue but the constraints on such action will be duly noted. Feminists will be reminded of our responsibility to be vigilant and persistent in working, particularly at the community level, for the implementation of the report's recommendations. And feminists, working as volunteers or in underpaid positions, will continue to work for change and, no doubt, for the implementation of the report's recommendations, while the institution moves on to the next trendy or topical issue.

This scenario raises two questions: why do institutions take up women's issues in the first place and what can feminists do to prevent replays of the scenario?

8.D. Why Institutions Take Up Women's Issues:

From the scenario we've drawn using the example of the United Way's response to wife battering, the apparent reason for institutional response to women's issues is to enable the institution and the state to take control of the issue, to redefine and compromise the issue so it can be accommodated without significant change in the status quo. This conclusion seems to fit particularly well when the issue in question reveals - as wife battering does, for example - a conflict between the reality of everyday life and the image of society the state supports. Institutional response, with an attendant redefinition of the issue, can serve to short-circuit the fundamental challenge the issue represents and rationalize the need for modest reforms or fine-tuning rather than radical change.

While there is validity in this conclusion, we must avoid the temptation to see the state and its institutions as deliberately setting out to accomplish that result. Instead we must pay attention to how the dominant ideology of our society provides a framework that makes that result an inevitable and natural consequence.

As Dorothy Smith has pointed out, analysing the state and ideological structures using a "model of manipulation from behind the scenes," as ideas designed to "deceive and fool the innocent and ignorant, put forward consciously and with malign intent by a ruling elite, is quite inadequate to analyse the phenomena with which we are concerned." (Smith, "An Analysis of Ideological Structures," p.1) Sue Findlay contends that rather than seeing the state in "an instrumental way," as an orchestrator or manipulator, the concept of hegemony provides a more accurate explanation of how the state

(and institutions) functions. She suggests that hegemony, "the construction and maintenance of an ideology in the interests of the ruling class...is sufficiently reflective of the realities of most people that it is internalized as if it reflected their own interests," and, thereby, makes overt manipulation, coercion, or repression largely unnecessary. (Findlay, "Politics of the Women's Movement," pp.22-23) As long as the impression stands that women's interests are reflected by and included in the dominant ideology, control of women's issues can be maintained by routine institutional practice. And one way institutions maintain the impression of inclusion is by appearing to take up women's issues as topics worthy of serious consideration.

A concept that contributes to the impression of inclusion is that of equality: the notion that a liberal society considers everyone to be equal and offers everyone equal opportunity and rights. Society's purported commitment to this concept has been used by oppressed groups - such as women, ethnic and cultural minorities, gays and lesbians, and others - to justify the inclusion of their concerns in decision-making and as justification for legislative and institutional change to ensure equal rights and treatment. However, when we look critically at the concept of equality and what it means in practice, problems become apparent.

As Zillah Eisenstein has argued in her analysis of "The Sexual Politics of the New Right" in the U.S.:

> A truly liberal society allows everyone to compete, but a race in and of itself requires winners and losers. According to the neo-conservatives, the problem is that everyone today claims the right to win. This has led people (particularly women and blacks) not only to expect equality of opportunity but to expect equality of outcomes or conditions.
>
> (Eisenstein, "The Sexual Politics of the New Right: Understanding the 'Crisis of Liberalism' for the 1980s," p.572)

While neo-conservatives criticize liberal affirmative action programs, for example, as part of "the excess of democracy" because they "predetermine the outcome of a competition" and encourage people to expect too much from government, Eisenstein suggests that liberalism has, in fact, made no attempt to create equality of conditions and has failed to create even equality of opportunity. (Ibid., pp.572-573) Nevertheless, the concept of equality leads oppressed groups to believe that they have a right to be

included and to be treated equally and that their interests will be included on a par with other groups' interests.

The crunch comes when this belief in equality is translated into demands - such as women's demands to participate equally in the job market - which expose the existence of competing interests (evident, for example, in the popular though unfounded concern that women entering the labour force will take jobs away from men). It is then left to the state to act as "the neutral (or objective) mediator" of competing interests because the state is seen as representing all people and all interests equally. Indeed, as Findlay points out, the state (and its institutions) must present the impression of a "unity of interests to maintain its legitimacy as the representation of the people, as opposed to the representative of class and gender interests." (Findlay, "Facing the State," p.59)

The notion of neutrality or objectivity is also a crucial element of the framework. It plays a central role in maintaining the legitimacy of the state and institutions - for, if objectivity is not challenged as a valid concept, it supports the state's claim to represent all of the people. In analysing the function of the law in a liberal democratic society, Catharine MacKinnon describes how objectivity contributes to maintaining the status quo and justifies inaction by institutions:

> Objectivity is liberal legalism's conception of itself. It legitimizes itself by reflecting its view of existing society, a society it made and makes by so seeing it, and calling that view, and that relation, practical rationality. If rationality is measured by point-of-viewlessness, what counts as reason will be that which corresponds to the way things are. Practical will mean that which can be done without changing anything.
>
> (MacKinnon, "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: Toward Feminist Jurisprudence," pp.644-645)

Thus, it is neither accident nor deliberate manipulation that institutional response to women's issues most often results in little, if any, change. The ideology in which we are all trained gives the state and its institutions the tools (the concepts of objectivity, inclusion and equality) and the responsibility to structure "responses to the demands of dominated forces [e.g. women] in order to contain any threats to dominant interests." (Findlay, "Struggles Within the State: The Feminist Challenge to Hegemony," p.13)

Given this analysis, it may be hard to see ways of challenging the state to change policies or practices to respond to women's interests in more than a superficial or cosmetic fashion. However, there are opportunities for change precisely because the state must maintain its legitimacy by appearing to represent all people; it must juggle and reach compromise among competing or different interests. Sue Findlay contends that, "in the process of responding to new demands and mediating a compromise among the contradictory interests of the dominated and dominant classes, the state is vulnerable to demands for reform as well as a certain redistribution of its resources...." (Ibid., p.13) Certainly, the Women's Movement's "successes" in getting legislative changes, limited though they have been, support this view. The danger we face as feminists is in overestimating such successes and seeing them as an acceptable goal, or, conversely, underestimating limited success as useless. To do either is to reinforce the primacy of the state and its institutions.

MacKinnon contends that we have been "caught between giving more power to the state in each attempt to claim it for women and leaving unchecked power in the society to men." She says the feminist posture toward the state has been "schizoid": "The state, with it the law, has been either omnipotent or impotent: everything or nothing." Using the example of violence against women, particularly rape and wife battering, she challenges feminists to recognize that if laws against wife assault are applied against husbands, "it can mean life itself" but still fail to address "the conditions that produce men who systematically express themselves violently toward women, women whose resistance is disabled, and the role of the state in this dynamic." She states, "The question for feminism, for the first time on its own terms, is: what is this state, from women's point of view?" (MacKinnon, "Feminism, Marxism,Method, and the State: Toward Feminist Jurisprudence," pp. 643-644) And, accordingly, we would add, what strategies will enable us to take advantage of the opportunities for useful institutional reforms without abdicating our responsibilities to the longer-term struggle to build an analysis of (and take informed action against) the role of the state in maintaining women's oppression?

9. Resisting Institutionalization

9.A. Traps Along the Way:

A decade ago, much of feminist effort was focussed on pressuring institutions to respond to wife battering and other women's issues. In the 1980s we have to deal with the consequences of limited success.

Institutional responses often create the impression (at least in the public consciousness) that an issue has been dealt with satisfactorily, thereby making it more difficult, less acceptable, to criticize or to demand more. Yet the responses have been notoriously inadequate. And, without feminists "consistently and skeptically watching bureaucracies," even the positive reforms "struggled for on behalf of battered women [and other women] can disappear." (Schechter, p.179)

There is ample evidence that feminist initiatives and gains are in danger of being institutionalized and undermined either directly or as a by-product of institutional response. For example, government funding and institutional support (including that of local United Ways across North America) for transition houses are hard-won feminist victories. This support has meant a substantially larger number of houses and an increased capacity for some to meet battered women's needs. Feminists have always been cautious about the strings attached to such funding. But increasingly we've been caught in a dilemma: how to balance the facts that the services are essential for women, the staff of the houses deserve to be paid an adequate wage, and the state has a responsibility to fund houses, against the reality that funders inevitably set standards and restrictions which can distort the organizational structure of houses, professionalize the services, and compromise their politics.

Susan Schechter has reviewed some of the effects of funding that workers in transition houses in the U.S. have described:

- I worry we are becoming another social service agency.
- There is a split between administrative and service work.... We have communication meetings for staff to deal with their feelings about their work.... This is a positive development but you also worry about forming a "professional" skills attitude. You have to remember where you came from - battering could happen to me.... Now we have formalized case reviews. In some ways it's useful.... But it can also create distance between you and the residents.

> - United Way criteria...mean having a board that sets policies, a director who directs, and salaries based on title, not need. We have never operated that way.... The staff and board are becoming very separate.... It's ironic that we've never been on more solid ground financially and more unhappy.
> (Schechter, p.94-95)

These comments reflect how some houses have been moved away from the "self-help methods, egalitarian philosophy, and collective organizational structures developed within the women's liberation movement" which typified the first feminist transition houses, based on "a grass-roots, non-professional view of battered women's needs." (Ibid., p.68)

The Canadian experience is similar. A case in point is the Ontario provincial government's formula for funding transition houses which includes "standards of staffing," entrenching a hierarchical structure for the houses funded under the formula. The merits and feasibility of houses operating as collectives have been debated in houses from Newfoundland to B.C. Opinions and structures vary. However, the Ontario government's formula, by specifying a supervisor at a higher salary level than staff, effectively removes the option of collective structures for those houses funded under the formula.

In addition, funding for most houses across Canada is administered by provincial governments under the cost-sharing agreements of the federal Canada Assistance Plan (CAP). Therefore, battered women who stay in transition houses funded under CAP must be "needs-tested" (which is, to say the least, inappropriate) and, thus, transition houses are brought into line with more traditional social service standards.

There is also a trend for governments to choose to fund transition houses developed by non-feminist (or even anti-feminist) church groups and community organizations. In some cases (notably in Ontario and the Prairies), governments are also encouraging, if not actually imposing, such concepts as family resource centres or safe homes and touting these as alternatives to transition houses and as appropriate services for battered women, especially in smaller rural or northern communities. Safe homes (whereby individuals or families provide a refuge by taking battered women into their own homes) have been accepted by some women's groups as a useful "stepping-stone" in the process of establishing a transition house in their community. However, others find the safe home concept to be totally inadequate. They argue that, among other things, it sets up a hierarchical relationship between the battered woman and

the "host family"; it cannot provide the opportunity, which a transition house does, for battered women to learn from each other that they're not alone, that wife battering is not a personal, private matter and that wife battering happens to women from all backgrounds. Further, they contend, safe homes essentially "privatize" the issue and services for battered women. For the governments involved support for any kind of service can be used to make it seem they're responding conscientiously to a pressing social problem of the day while their support for non-feminist services imposes a "balance" to feminist services and can erode the original concept of transition houses.

For feminists this trend raises several problems. When more services are clearly needed, how can we be critical just because some don't conform to "feminist standards"? In addition, there's been a recognition within the women's movement that, particularly in smaller communities, a feminist profile may mean loss of community support. If we are critical of these new houses and services, how can we do it in a way that is not an unproductive and alienating "more feminist than thou" approach? These are important questions especially for provincial associations which bring representatives of transition houses and other battered women's services together to debate the goals and orientation of services and to develop political strategy or policy: will it be possible to develop unity without operating from a dangerously low common denominator?

Of course, over time we can expect governments increasingly to take the route of supporting services that fit more closely with their ideology. This trend signifies an intensifying pressure to conform: if we want to be heard as advocates for battered women our chances are better if we are "acceptable" and "reasonable" according to the standards of the powers that be. This kind of pressure is nothing new: indeed many of the first transition houses were started by women who were considered to be "unacceptable" - because they were lesbians or radical feminists, for example. And, as Megan Ellis has noted, transition house workers have always been aware that, particularly in public education work, "the expression of a radical analysis could result in a radical relocation of funds." (Ellis, "Vancouver Transition House: A Case Study," p.16)

However, feminist services were able to give each other a measure of support because they were all part of a political movement with similar analysis and goals. With the advent of more non-feminist houses and services, the political context is diluted and the pressure to conform to "acceptable"

behaviour is as much an internal force among houses and services as an external one. Feminists are facing a real challenge in trying to present a united political front while confronting political divisions in our own ranks. Further, as Susan Schechter has said, "current activists must insure that the movement neither denies its history nor the rights (and contributions) of women within it." (Schechter, p.271)

In addition, the political nature and work of feminist services such as transition houses is being threatened by Revenue Canada policy. Most houses are non-profit voluntary organizations and have received a charitable tax number from Revenue Canada, which enables them to receive donations (tax deductible for the donor) to supplement government funding. "While charities have historically been precluded from engaging in political activities," Megan Ellis has pointed out that Revenue Canada is tightening the definition of "political activities" to include "writing letters to the editor to air political views or to attempt to sway public opinion." The danger that Revenue Canada will revoke the charitable registration of groups and services engaged in political action, redefined, represents a significant challenge for feminists and could serve to undermine further the political aspect of the transition house concept. As Ellis contends:

> The re-emergence of this antiquated policy emphasizes the schizophrenic attitude on the part of both the government and the public at large, to social services. On the one hand social services are intended to alleviate the problem of poverty, or rape, or child abuse or disabilities, yet on the other hand the service organizations are not supposed to articulate their views on the larger conditions or causes. Service organizations are thus to limit themselves to a very narrow time frame, neither the historical development of the problem nor the possible future avenues of action are to be discussed. Most importantly, suffering is to be addressed on an individual and not a collective basis.
>
> (Ellis, p.18)

The counselling transition house workers have traditionally done - based on a self-help, peer counselling approach - is also under attack. In one eastern province the government has reportedly proposed that only professional social workers in its employ should "counsel" battered women with the houses expected to provide shelter and little, if anything, else. In some parts of Canada debates about the need for professional credentials to work with battered women have raged for years. Again, transition house

workers, whose expertise has long been undervalued, are caught in a Catch-22 situation: If they hold to the feminist view that professional credentials are not necessary and are, in fact, an impediment rather than an aid to working with battered women, they risk perpetuating a prevalent notion that to be a transition house worker does not require "real" skills and, therefore, is not due the recognition and respect accorded to professionals in our society.

In a few Canadian houses, the workers themselves are reportedly "bureaucratizing" their work with battered women by setting specific office hours for counselling and for direct work with residents. Though this may well be an attempt to protect staff from the demands of a job for which they are inadequately paid, the effect is to distance staff from residents and is destructive of the principles central to feminist services.

Few feminists would insist that the original concept of transition houses must be adhered to without modification; the problem we face today is losing the concept through attrition and through modifications that are not in battered women's best interests.

On another front, feminists' advocacy for victims of violence against women has raised public awareness about the way the criminal justice system treats victims generally. As a result, a "victims movement" has developed in the United States and Canada and led the federal government to establish a Federal-Provincial Task Force on Victims of Crime. Victim/witness services have been implemented within police and legal systems in several communities across the country. Not surprisingly these services are meant to be all-inclusive: all victims of crime are to be served. Still in their early stages of development in Canada, these services are reportedly intended to supplement existing "community resources" such as rape crisis centres and transition houses and not to duplicate or undermine them. However, it is logical to assume that police officers, for example, will more readily refer to an "in-house" victim services unit than an "outside" resource, especially given the difficulty many feminist services have had in developing credibility and a working relationship with police departments. Accordingly, it may become increasingly difficult to muster justification for the existence of rape crisis and transition house services since the system itself can claim to be meeting victims' needs. At the very least, the trend to generalist services within existing institutions would indicate that feminist services will be challenged to explain once more what is so "special" about rape victims and battered women.

And, of course, the trend of government cutbacks in funding for services exacerbates these problems. So-called "streamlining," cutting excess from government budgets, and a re-emphasis on voluntarism and the family represent serious threats to feminist services. Governments' avowed need to save money is being used to cut services and to argue that church groups, volunteer community organizations and the family (clearly, that means women in the family) must take up the slack. As a consequence, it would seem we are but a step away from increased pressure on battered women to stay with their husbands: there will be fewer places for women to go for help; the family is re-emerging as an inviolate institution in which we must not intervene; and it has, of course, traditionally been considered women's responsibility to hold the family together. Will anyone remember that even the United Way declared "the family can be and often is a violent place" and recommended support for transition houses?

What we see happening is a compromising of feminist services and organizational structures, professionalization and bureaucratization of feminist work, and redefinition of women's experience so women's concerns can be absorbed into traditional frameworks and dominant ideology and rendered invisible again.

These trends are not easy ones to resist or counter. To refuse to play by the state's rules and ideology is to risk loss of credibility and visibility for women's issues and experience, as well as the loss of funding and support for transition houses and other essential services and organizations. Yet, accepting the state's rules and ideology can have and is having essentially the same result: the institutionalization of women's issues and invalidation of women's experience.

And, although we've used feminist work on wife battering as a focus in this discussion, it's clear other aspects of the women's movement are not exempt from these developments. As the pressure increases on feminists to conform to society's dominant ideology and to play by the state's rules, we are being forced to reduce our demands from what is required to what is possible or feasible for the state. Lobbyists for women's concerns are put in a position of tinkering with the existing legal and legislative frameworks and accepting the state's agenda and timetable, rather than working towards the fundamental change that is in women's interests. Debate among feminists about what changes are needed is being stifled and reduced to a discussion of legislative details. In the process we are in danger

of losing sight of the fact that fundamental change is indeed necessary and we're in danger of settling for short-term, inadequate and reversible gains as ends in themselves. Settling for less also means increased credibility, legitimacy and authority for the state, in its role of neutral mediator of conflicting interests. Giving in to the pressures on us as feminists to conform, to be acceptable, to negotiate with the state on its terms will leave us without a negotiating position at all and, ultimately, without a feminist movement to call our own.

9.B. Feminism as Method and Strategy:

The analysis we've presented in this discussion paper and the record of feminist work on the issue of wife battering reveal not only the dimensions of the problems facing the Women's Movement but also considerations for dealing with them. Central to these considerations is the continuing importance and significance of feminism and feminist method.

Nancy Hartsock has written that "at bottom, feminism is a mode of analysis, a method of approaching life and politics, a way of asking questions and searching for answers rather than a set of political conclusions about the oppression of women." She notes that "women are applying that method to their own experiences as women in order to transform the social relations which define their lives" and she reminds us that consciousness-raising groups epitomize feminist method:

> The practice of small-group consciousness-raising with its stress on examining and understanding experience and on connecting personal experience to the structures which define women's lives - is the clearest example of the method basic to feminism. Through this practice women have learned that it was important to build their analysis from the ground up, beginning with their own experience.
>
> (Hartsock, Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism, pp.58-59)

Specifically we've seen how the feminist approach characterized women's identification, definition, and action on wife battering. Listening to and believing women, building an analysis of the "problem" women described, based on women's experience and on making connections between women's accounts, made the reality of wife battering visible. Further it made the issue visible not as an individual, interactional problem, which is how traditional social scientists and service providers had seen it, but as a widespread problem of misogyny and men's political and economic

dominance over women. This analysis in turn led feminists to develop services and programmes, notably transition houses, which reflected that analysis and the reality of battered women's lives and needs.

It is important to recall that this whole process was made possible by the existence of women's centres, consciousness-raising groups, and other organizational forums feminists had created to give women access to each other - forums for listening to and believing each other and validating our experience. It was and is a revolutionary effort, for as Catharine MacKinnon has said, feminism's project is "to uncover and claim as valid the experience of women, the major content of which is the devalidation of women's experience."(MacKinnon, "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: Toward Feminist Jurisprudence,"p.638, emphasis added.) The very act of listening to and believing each other as women enables us to see and begin to understand the subordination of women, and, thus, to challenge it.

Transition houses gave battered women access to each other, thereby ending the isolation and privacy of the family which had served to perpetuate wife battering and to keep this aspect of women's lives invisible. Learning from battered women also enabled feminists to refine our analysis and understanding of the situation of women generally and battered women particularly.

Of course, it is the making visible and the articulation of women's situation that represents a challenge to the status quo and necessitates the state's attempts to institutionalize women's issues. As we've seen institutionalization is in large measure an attempt to redefine our experience so it can be absorbed and accommodated into existing frameworks. It is an inevitable response to feminism. This does not mean that feminism is flawed; on the contrary, it signifies its power. In our view, if feminists have failed in any sense, it is in not going far enough. We have not paid adequate attention to building and applying our analysis of the state and its institutions. However, this is not to say none of this work has been done; we do agree with Hartsock that women have applied the feminist method to transform the social relations which define our lives. More of this work remains to be done if we are to resist institutionalization successfully.

The United Way case we've presented in this paper, as well as feminists' work with other institutions, underlines the importance of using the feminist method, of starting with women's experience as central, in continuing to

build our understanding and analysis of how the state and its institutions function to institutionalize women's issues and to maintain women's invisibility and subordination.

It's possible to outline some of the implications of applying the feminist method in our work with institutions. We've seen, for example, that to start with women's perspective on an issue reveals how dominant ideological structures, traditional social science theories, and institutional frameworks serve to exclude or marginalize women's experience. Similarly, by declaring our point of view, we reject objectivity and begin to reveal and challenge point-of-viewlessness and objectivity as the state's and the male point of view. Challenging ideological structures' purported inclusion of women calls into question the orientation of experts and professionals trained in those structures, and leads to an assertion of the validity of the expertise of feminists, acquired through work with women and a critical approach to dominant ideology. Using language specific to women's situation represents a rejection of the gender-neutral, obfuscating terms of the "Oppressor's Language." To require that women's situation be dealt with on its own terms is to resist attempts to amalgamate women's issues with so-called larger issues which render women's experience inconsequential or invisible.

We can also apply feminist method (and common sense) to set guidelines for our work with institutions. For example, in deciding to work with institutions, it is clearly necessary to determine why and when to do it, on which issues, and what we can realistically accomplish. If these determinations are made in the context of our work with women and women's groups, rather than simply in response to institutional interest, they can be used as a framework that will enable us to evaluate our work on our own terms and decide if or when we've accomplished our goals in working with a particular institution, when to hang in and when to bail out. Although it is unlikely feminists will be entirely successful in wresting the authority to set the agenda and timetable for institutional response away from institutions, at least we can set the terms and goals for our participation.

It is also necesary, at the outset, to examine what the institution's purpose is, what its decision-making structure is, how that decision-making process operates, and what authority and influence the institution's representatives or staff wield. Further, in the course of participating

in institutional work, we can use caucuses with other feminists and women's groups as a reference point for strategies, to ground our work, to analyse and inform each other about institutional responses, and to ensure that those responses will not undermine the initiatives and ongoing work of women's groups outside institutional settings. Parallel strategies are required: whatever work we do with institutions must not be done at the expense of our organizing work with women or we will lose not only our capacity to resist co-optation but also the impetus and base for independent action. In brief, feminists must define ways, as Susan Schechter has noted, "of co-operating with institutions" and at the same time remaining "critical of them and mobilized on [our] own behalf." (Schechter, p.179)

While we contend these efforts to contextualize and organize our work with institutions can be useful in resisting institutionalization of women's issues, it is essential to continue to refine our analysis and strategies based on the new understandings we develop of the state and its institutions. The state, ideological structures, and specific institutions are not static and unchanging. Indeed, a large part of the problem feminists have to contend with is the state's ability and imperative to adapt to and absorb challenges to its legitimacy. Just as we continue to discover aspects of women's experience that cause us to rethink issues we may have thought were fully analysed, so we will continue to uncover changes or previously hidden factors in institutional practice and devise strategies to deal with "new traps along the way."

We must also continue to build ideological structures that are our own, based in women's experience. As Dorothy Smith has said, "In some sense, [we] must dare to re-invent the world of knowledge, of thought, of symbols and images; not, of course, by repudiating everything that has been done but by subjecting it to scrutiny and critique from the position of women as subject." (Smith, "An Analysis of Ideological Structures," p.11)

To resist the institutionalization of women's issues and experience and to reclaim the women's movement from the forces of compromise and limitation requires that we get back to the basics of feminism - not out of nostalgia or romantic notions of the past but because feminism works for women. For feminism, in Catharine MacKinnon's words, "claims the voice of women's silence, the sexuality of our eroticized desexualization, the fullness of 'lack,' the centrality of our marginality and exclusion, the public nature of privacy, the presence of our absence." (MacKinnon, "Feminism, Marxism,

Method, and the State: Toward Feminist Jurisprudence." p.639) Feminism is both perspective and incentive: "women's situation offers no outside to stand on or gaze at, no inside to escape to, too much urgency to wait...." (Ibid.,p.639) And. feminism is also the method we need to act: a critical and dynamic approach to life and politics which enables us to understand and connect personal experience to political structures and, thus, to develop strategies to end women's oppression.

APPENDIX I

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APPENDIX II

BILL C-127 REVIEW ARTICLE

("Bill C-127: How did we get there?; Where do we go from here?," KINESIS, Oct. 1982)

BILL C-127: How did we get there? Where do we go from here?

We are a working group who came together, initially to discuss the implications of Bill C-127. Our names are Kate Andrew, Jan Barnsley, Megan Ellis, Debra Lewis, Hilarie McMurray, Joanne Ranson and Jillian Ridington.

We have all, over the last several years, worked on the issue of rape and rape law; as researchers, in legal practice, and as rape crisis centre workers. We have all been involved in presenting briefs or position papers to national women's organizations and the federal government.

Our intention is to work to produce information for women, cutting down on the "legalese", about the new law and its implications for women. In the course of our discussions it became clear to us that one of the aspects most needing explanation was how we got this bill in the first place. Three of us - Megan, Jan and Joanne - decided to write this article.

After studying the contents of Bill C-127, we concluded that some of the new provisions had serious negative consequences for women. Yet, some major women's groups had supported its passage.

The following article is an attempt to look at the process by which "women's issues" become translated into legislative amendments. It is a brief examination of the respective roles of "grassroots" women's groups, national women's organizations, and the federal bureaucracy. Our intent is not to blame any organization or any individual, but to stimulate discussion around the strategy of legislative reform, the role of national organizations, and even the parameters of the rape discussion itself.

The early days

The Canadian Women's movement began addressing the issue of rape in about 1972. In that year Vancouver Rape Relief opened its doors and within the next six years there were more than thirty rape crisis centres operating in Canada. The anti-rape movement gained momentum as women began to recognize the violence in our lives. The injustice perpetrated upon the victims of rape by the courts (or the second rape as we called it) sparked discussions around rape law. We came to realize that male attitudes to rape were enshrined in the law, and the law in no way served to protect the physical and sexual autonomy of women.

During this time period, some feminists, notably Diana E. Russell, Susan Brownmiller, and Debra Lewis and Lorene Clark, began to do research in the area of rape. Generally, these authors suggested the law be reformed to provide for gender-free offences of sexual assault to replace the existing offence of rape.

The various books and articles which had surface, coupled with the loud voices of the "grassroots" anti-rape movement (e.g. Rape Crisis Centres, Women Against Rape) prompted various national bodies to take notice of the issues being raised. Indeed, as early as October 1974, the Advisory Council on the Status of Women had decided that one of their priority concerns would be sexual offences in the Criminal Code.

In 1976, Bill C-71 was passed, which was intended as a step towards giving protection to victims of rape. It became very clear that the changes only affected procedure in rape trials and that the substance of the law remained the same. Certainly, reporting of rapes did not increase and rape victims continued to suffer degradation at the hands of the law.

Meanwhile, there was some discussion among women's groups as to what form a new law should take. There appeared to be general agreement that the whole area sexual offences should be overhauled, that rape should be considered an "offence against the person" (and not lumped together with offences of public morals), and that the violent nature of the act must be stressed. (There was even some discussion that the sexual aspect could be left out altogether.) This represented the state of consensus reached when the National Association of Sexual Assault Crisis Centres met in Victoria in 1978. They adopted policy recommending that new assault offences be created to prohibit all acts of forcible sexual contact and that there be no differentiation on the basis of the gender of the parties to the offence.

Thus, by 1978 this position regarding how rape laws should be changed was established, although there had not been extensive debate reagrding degenderization or the effects of suing the term "sexual assault" instead of rape. Attention shifted to the federal government's proposals to change rape laws.

Government moves

The federal government's first move was to introduce Bill C-52 into the House of Commons - the day after the National Conference of Sexual Assault Crisis Centres. No mention of the Bill had been made by the government's representative who attended the Victoria conference. The Bill, proposing the substitution of "indecent assault" and "aggravated indecent assault" for the offence of rape, was seen merely as a bone thrown to placate the anti-rape lobby.

The Bill did not come close to the more progressive Law Reform Commission working paper on Sexual Offences which appeared three weeks later. In fact, as was suspected would happen, the government allowed Bill C-52 to die on the order paper. The Law Reform Commission's final recommendations came out in November of 1978 favouring the removal of husbands' exemption from prosecution for rape and suggesting that the offences of "sexual interference" and "sexual aggression" replace the crime of rape.

In January 1981, the federal Justice Minister introduced Bill C-53. According to staff in his department he wanted to contradict charges that he had only been working on issues related to Canada's new Constitution. C-53 proposed replacement of rape by the two-tiered offence of "sexual assault" and "aggravated sexual assault" and represented some movement towards the positions developed by national feminist groups. The debates about government legislation did not focus on such key issues as definitions of sexual assault - which were left to the discretion of the judiciary.

Instead, the discussions centred on legal terminology, technical details and their ramifications: Should "bodily harm" be "serious"? Should belief of consent be "reasonable" or merely "honest"? Were the penalties adequate? - with sentences for sexual assault (supposedly covering everything from "bum-pinching" to "rape with a minimum of violence") ranging from a possible fine to ten years imprisonment. The government's moves were centre-stage. Women's groups were asked to put their energy and trust in tinkering with the criminal justice system - the very system which has come under so much criticism over the last ten years for its anti-woman bias.

The practice of national women's organizations

The two groups that have been most visible recently in lobbying for changes in rape laws are the National Association of Women and the Law (NAWL) and the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC). (The Canadian Association of Sexual Assault Centres was not as visible. The departure, in the summer of 1979, of the National Assiter of the NASACC and her replacement by a between-conference governing body of Regional Representatives decentralized rape crisis centres' work around legal reform. This work was later delegated to the Ontario Coalition. However, for whatever reasons, CASAC does not appear as a prominent force in the debate around legislative change.)

NAWL is a group made up mostly of lawyers and law students. They are educationally qualified and strategically located (including having members in key positions in the federal government) to be advocates for the concerns of local women's groups who have neither the time nor the opportunity for concerted lobbying. It is logical that government officials would prefer to work with a national group having such expertise. And, it is understandable that women's groups tended to defer to NAWL as a group with expertise that is particularly valuable in efforts to change legislation.

However, questions have to be asked about the wisdom of deferring to women who are, in the case of NAWL, actually part of or

Questions have to be asked about the wisdom of deferring to women who are working to become part of the system - a system that has not served women's best interests.

working to become part of the system that needs to be changed - the system that has not traditionally served women's best interests. In the women's movement we've had ample evidence of the difficulties women face in working from within the system to change it. And, we've tried to avoid letting the state or the media set up some of us as "experts", knowing that isolation of such women and often unfair resentment of them can result. A further problem is that once we embark on a course of letting feminists who are removed from the daily realities of rape victims, for example, speak for us it is harder for grassroots concerns to be heard. Unfortunately, it is also true that the decision-making procedures of national groups compound this problem.

NAWL formulates policy through conferences held every two years (e.g. 1979, 81, 83) and in the interim periods through an elected steering committee. The following sequence of events is an example of this process of policy making and shows how it limits the participation of members at the local level:

- February 1979 - NAWL conference recommends four tiers of sexual assault offences ("honest belief" defence was not an issue).
- February 198[illegible] - NAWL conference - no further resolutions re: rape laws.
- September 198[illegible] - NAWL brief (prepared by a few members) in response to C-53 presented to steering committee. Brief recommends three tiers of sexual assault offences and adds "reasonable" to defence of "honest belief".
- April 27, 198[illegible] - three members of NAWL appear before the Parliamentary Committee on C-53 to present brief.
- July 23, 1982 - Memo to members advising of NAWL's position as set out in brief to Parliamentary Committee.

Graphic by Janet Morgan

Groups such as the Vancouver Association of Women and the Law (VAWL) and the Toronto Area Caucus of Women and the Law (TACWL) prepared and distributed their own analyses of Bill C-53 which differed - in TACWL's case, substantially - from NAWL's positions. However, as far as the federal government was concerned, it is clear NAWL's statements carried the most weight.

In reviewing the role of the National Action Committee, the concerns we've raised about undue deference to experts and less than fully democratic internal decision-making procedures are apparent. NAC is Canada's premier national women's organization, with member groups as diverse as the Communist Party of Canada and the United Church (and including NAWL), and claims to represent millions of Canadian women. Lobbying is a focal point of NAC's work and a regular adjunct to its annual general meeting (AGM) which is held in Ottawa each March precisely to afford access to federal politicians.

It is significant that after NAC's 1982 lobby, members were outraged by the low representation of Liberal MP's - particularly when women's groups had been asked to advise the government about C-53. It is obvious now that the Liberals did not bother themselves by meeting with women who'd come from across Canada to lobby them because they had already established a working relationship with key members of NAC (and NAWL) more conveniently located in Ottawa and Toronto. There is evidence to make the charge that the feds siphoned off certain NAC (and NAWL) women to consult - women whose positions on amendments to the Criminal Code were relatively compatible with the government's preferences. This practice set it up so the government could later claim - as it already has - that it gave us women what we wanted. Thus, it will make any future efforts to change the legislation even more difficult. Unfortunately NAC, in particular, co-operated in this manoevre - perhaps unwittingly though, no doubt, with good intentions.

For example, in 1982 NAC forwarded its brief to the Parliamentary Committee on C-53 prior to its AGM in March. Participants in the Justice workshops at the AGM remember having to insist that the contents of that brief be made available to them. The brief was not put forward for approval by NAC members. Further, it is noteworthy that the NAC brief deferred to NAWL and endorsed fully the recommendations NAWL had presented. This perpetuated and reinforced the dominance of those few women who had taken responsibility for developing NAWL's position. In addition, when NAC actually sent a delegate to appear in person before the Parliamentary Committee on C-53, its representative - a feminist author/researcher who had previously been consulted by the Justice Department on drafting rape legislation - spoke at times as an individual and contradicted some points in the policy on which NAC's brief was based. Later, when NAC was continuing to lobby for improvements in C-53, its executive and consultants found themselves in the difficult circumstance of having to take positions that would not undermine NAC's credibility by contradicting what its representative had said to the Parliamentary Committee.

A final example of the problems of responding to government is the eleventh hour activities surrounding passage of C-127 (the abridged version of Bill C-53). Amendments were flying from all sides in the House of Commons and women across Canada were trying to fathom what was really being proposed. We had to rely on our representatives in the east. Unfortunately, the NAC executive apparently gave no thought to refusing to play by so-called "parliamentary rules" and take time for careful consideration of the amendments. Instead, local NAC members were urged by the executive to send telegrams supporting a Bill they had not even seen. As it turns out, NAC's executive support for passage of the legislation contravenes policy passed by delegates to its own AGM in 1982.

It is important to appreciate how insidiously demands from government, for input and response, work to compromise organizations and individual advocates - particularly when the stakes are as high as rape and assault legislation that can affect so many Canadian women. It is neither useful nor valid to blame the individuals involved. Also, the difficulties of being a national women's organization in a country the size of Canada and the pressure to respond to government, to play by the government's rules and schedules, can make checking with local members seem cumbersome and inefficient. No one would charge that NAC (or NAWL) deliberately dienfranchised and alienated it members - however, that is one result.

How do we define 'experts' on particular women's issues? Should the 'rape debate' be re-opened? Is legislative change an end in itself?

Questions for the future

The account and analysis of process we've presented is not meant to undermine or devalue the work of the women who have researched and written or lobbied in NAC and NAWL for changes in rape and assault laws. Without their contributions the legislation would be even worse than C-127. But C-127 is not good enough! And the process by which we got it raises serious questions we must all address if we are to learn from these experiences for future work:

1. How do we in the women's movement define "experts" on particular women's issues? How can we balance the tendency to value more highly the expertise acquired through academia, research, and writing, with the importance of expertise obtained in direct work with women and the problems they face in their every day experience?

2. Should the "rape debate" be re-opened? What does "sexual assault" really mean (there are no definitions in C-127)? How can we cut through the legalistic jargon and deal with the problems rape victims and battered women will face as a result of C-127?

3. How do we want to do legislative change? Do we see legislative change as an end in itself? Shouldn't we be pressuring for needed reforms in such a way as to empower and politicize women in the process? In terms of a strategy for legislative change - do we accept that change must come about gradually; that we must respond to governments' language, time tables, and rules; that some change is better than none; and should we tailor our demands to what is "feasible"?

4. How can national women's organizations be more effective *advocates* for the concerns identified by feminists working with women at the grassroots/community level? Can the decision-making structure and practices of national groups be revised to respect local groups more and minimize eastern domination? Can local groups find ways of participating more fully in national organizations so that women working at the federal level are less isolated and better supported? Can the NAC October 22-24 mid-year meetings in Vancouver be a place to start?

The years preceding the passage of Bill C-127 provide us with a "case study" of a recurring problem - how do we best integrate the efforts of women working at all levels and simultaneously resist pressure to play by the government's rules? If discussion of the issues raised here provides us with a better blueprint for our future work, we will have made significant gains from a bad situation.

APPENDIX III

TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF FEMINISM

Towards a Definition of Feminism

1. Feminism (being a feminist) means putting women first. It requires starting with women's experience - our own and other women's (rather than focussing on human liberation or on how some men are oppressed, etc., etc.) - as the basis for developing analysis and strategy to guide our work.

2. "Feminism is, at bottom, a mode of analysis - a method of approaching life and politics, a way of asking questions and searching for answers rather than a set of political conclusions about the oppression of women."*

   To be a feminist then is to be critical - to ask questions about how society functions, about how women live in society. Feminism is a process of questioning rather than a 'dogma' or a set of prescribed positions or answers.

3. By starting with women's experience and analysing how women live in society, it is clear that women are oppressed, socially and economically and that women's oppression is institutionalized in our society, whether the institution is small (the family) or large (the government, the economy). Feminism enables women to see how and why our everyday lives are affected and shaped by society's ideologies and institutions.

4. Feminism, being a feminist, pre-supposes that women's oppression must end. It means a commitment to working in whatever ways we can for change.

5. To be a feminist requires identification with other women and acknowledgement that all of us, as women, are affected by women's oppression. To work as feminists, therefore, is not to work for the benefit of some "poor downtrodden women" over there, but for ourselves. This does not mean we're all affected in the same way - or that all women are the same and have the same problems - in fact, it's essential to be clear about the differences. It does mean suspending the distance between ourselves and other women and recognizing that our lives are on a continuum based in women's oppression: Some of us are in a better more privileged place than others, but we're all on the continuum.

To summarize -

Feminism is a method of analysis and work, a commitment, and a perspective that puts women first, that starts with our own and other women's experience as a basis for working towards ending women's oppression.

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*Nancy Hartsock in Feminist Theory and Revolutionary Strategy